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Philip Roth and the American Liberal Tradition since FDR

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Abstract

This thesis takes as its focus several works in the late period of Philip Roth's writing and examines the way in which these particular texts address issues of American national experience since the Depression. In particular, this study looks at Roth's assessment of a distinctly modern liberal vision that came to prominence during the 1930s and was to dominate American political and cultural life until the late 1960s. In thus covering the wider historical sweep of these novels, the research will draw attention to the way in which such broader matters of American cultural and political life intersect with more local issues of Jewish-American subjectivity and literary style that have been explored recurrently throughout Roth's greater body of fiction. This study thus aims to show how the more recent 'historical turn' in Roth's novelistic focus is in fact consistent with certain pivotal themes that have helped to define his overall development as a writer.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction …….....1-47.

2. “Redface”: Exploring Issues of Liberal Politics and Literary Style in *I Married a Communist* …….....48-105.

3. “The disruption of the anticipated American future”: the Sixties and the Shattering End of the Age of Liberal Consensus in *American Pastoral*……...106-164.

4. “Nothing lasts, and yet nothing passes”: Confronting the Impasse of Race and Ethnicity in *The Human Stain*…….165-228.

5. The End as Beginning and the Beginning as End: the Unfinished Cycle of Trauma in *The Plot against America* and *Exit Ghost*…… 229-274.

6. Bibliography…….. 275-288

Introduction

This thesis locates and explores a historical thematic within Philip Roth's later period of writing that puts into sharper relief certain issues of literary style and Jewish-American cultural identity that have marked his overall body of work. In particular, I will pay attention to the manner in which Roth's fiction appears to take a certain 'historical turn' of direction in the novels of what has been dubbed the American trilogy: *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist* and *The Human Stain*. The main body of my thesis will discuss how this relatively loose bound collection of novels, tied together by the narrative persona of Nathan Zuckerman, explores the interaction between the private lives of its protagonists and certain significant moments in American public life since World War Two. Through the addition of a concluding chapter, I will also examine how the historical themes that the American trilogy explores are developed in two subsequent novels: *The Plot against America* and *Exit Ghost*. Although the works chosen for this study present a broader historical canvas than much of Roth's other work, I wish to argue that these novels in fact offer a clear sense of continuity with some of the presiding issues of literary style and cultural identity that have dominated his literary career prior to the publication of *American Pastoral* in 1997. In this way, I hope to demonstrate how his later fiction enables us to understand in much greater detail Roth's relationship to the American cultural scene within which he has emerged and developed as a writer.

Roth and the American Liberal Tradition

Each of the five novels that this thesis examines focuses upon a different historical episode in American history, spanning a total period of about seventy years from Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s to the Presidential re-election of George W. Bush in 2004. Specifically, these texts examine various moments of crisis within the liberal brand of American political idealism that emerged under Roosevelt, and which was to dominate national life during the Depression, World War Two and

throughout the early post-war period prior to the sixties. This particularly modern form of liberal politics derived its influence from certain "progressive" beliefs that had been gaining prominence in America in the early part of the twentieth century, and which helped to distinguish it in many areas from *laissez-faire* ideas about the capitalist market and competitive individualism that had motivated nineteenth century liberalism. As opposed to the notion of "society as a collection of atomized individuals freely pursuing their self-interest" (Thompson, 12-13) that influenced classic liberal concepts of political and economic freedom, progressive thought advanced ideas about the corporatist structure of modern American society in which individual members "were intersubjectively related to the public around them" (14). According to such a viewpoint, the wide collection of groups and individuals who constituted the American citizenry were no longer deemed as independent social agents whose lives were relatively separate from each other, but were instead considered to be far more inter-dependent on each other's actions. In light of this new understanding about the civic ties that forged the nation together into a formidable collective, progressives argued that a greater amount of centralised state management of social and economic relations between American citizens would ensure a wider level of democratic parity within the increasingly complex fabric of modern capitalist society. Michael Thompson, for example, has discussed how the broadly defined "Progressive movement" of the early twentieth century helped to supply later liberal thought with an overall "vision of democratic life that emphasised association, cooperation, the centrality of the state for achieving broader public ends, and the need to fuse the economy to standards of the public good" (10). Similarly, Richard Pells has argued that "Progressives invented the language and set forth the goals that future movements for social change [in America] would naturally inherit" (1973, 10). Although he stresses the disunities and failures that plagued the coalition of political campaigns and intellectual ideas which sprung up during what has been labelled the Progressive Era, Pells underlines the overall achievement of such movements in influencing the later New Deal blueprint for a "cooperative commonwealth of government, labor, and business" (21).

The emergence of this innovative approach to notions of economy and democratic citizenry within American liberalism took full effect during the New Deal. As Terry Cooney explains, the New Deal put into place certain defensive measures against the "harsher implications" of capitalist individualism, thereby enshrining the progressive belief "that in a modern society individuals had only a partial control over their fate" (1995, 50). Elsewhere, Michael Szalay describes such attempts to curb the potentially damaging effects of unfettered and unregulated capitalism on individual American citizens as the Federal State's inauguration of "a system of exchange essentially compensatory for human experience" (2). The New Deal thus set out, amid the catastrophe of the Great Depression, to use the levers of government to harness and organise what was increasingly being viewed as a rogue and unforgiving capitalist economy. It presented itself as the guardian of what Roosevelt called an "economic morality" (Second Inaugural Address, paragraph 11) that would provide for and protect the material welfare of all Americans, and not just the interests of a relative few:

> In every land there are always at work forces that drive men apart and forces that draw men together. In our personal ambitions we are individualists. But in our seeking for economic and political progress as a nation, we all go up, or else we all go down, as one people ("Second Inaugural Address, paragraph 34)

I will discuss the origins and later developments of this liberal ideal in much greater detail in the chapters that follow. Suffice at this stage to note that the claims of the New Deal and its later incarnations within American liberalism gave expression to decidedly populist and egalitarian ideas of national co-operation and unity. This marked a particularly inclusive celebration of American nationalism, according to which the country's many diverse regions, economic sectors and ethnic groups were seen to be united in collective harmony by the democratic pursuit of mutually beneficial opportunities (economic or otherwise) for self-advancement. Wendy Wall, for instance, argues that the Roosevelt period saw the birth of the modern idea of a unifying "American Way." Wall explains that, although this concept of national cohesion has been subject to much contested claims in later history, it found a particularly pointed definition during the New Deal as "the ability of diverse individuals to live together

harmoniously" (Wall, 7). The progressive liberal values that prevailed during the Depression and went on to dominate American life until the mid-sixties were thus based upon certain universalising democratic notions of a common and inclusive national culture. Todd Gitlin, for instance, has referred to the universal assumptions underlying modern liberal ideas as stemming from "a belief in progress through the unfolding of a humanity present – at least potentially – in every human being" (1995, 85). In the chapters that follow, this idea of the universal participation of all Americans within the progressive spirit of nationhood – as opposed to the competitive breed of social and cultural atomisation that was lionised by nineteenth century liberal beliefs – will play a significant role in my discussions on modern liberalism and how it has been put under considerable strain since the sixties. In particular, I will examine Roth's divided relationship to notions of a shared 'American-ness' within liberal ideology as one whose American subjectivity is also inflected by his distinctive origins as an ethnic Jew.

The Rooseveltian model of modern American liberalism that I have been sketching here is deeply tied to certain Enlightenment values about mankind's ability to shape its own environment and direct historical forces along rationally controlled lines. Pells, for instance, has mentioned how the Progressive Era saw the rise of a new sensibility in American political thought, which moved away from a *laissez-faire* faith in the 'natural' progress guaranteed by the invisible hand of the market and toward the knowledge that "men had to rely increasingly on planning, efficiency, and expertise in controlling the rate and direction of [socio-economic] change" (1973, 9). This appeal to rational action is directly linked to the notion of universality that I have mentioned above. Progressive liberal efforts to successfully steer economic, social and cultural forces toward reasonably sought after ends are predicated upon certain assumptions about the common aspirations and values that exist among the American masses. Of course, Rooseveltian liberalism, as my chapters will indicate, is highly fused by notions of pragmatism, conflict and compromise that make it far less mechanically linear or cohesive than my last remark might suggest. At the same time, modern liberal belief in America has managed to find a certain degree of momentum from what Anthony

Hutchinson terms its "invocation of an ever-improving future that appeal[s] to an Enlightenment-rooted faith in reason and progress" (68).

In the novels chosen for the present study, Roth explores how various historical inconsistencies and contradictions have worked to tear asunder the liberal-progressive narrative that prevailed in America at mid-century. These texts almost mythically evoke a sort of epic liberal epoch in which it appeared that American history was being steered along highly compassionate and moral lines toward an ever-increasingly benign vision of the future. This thesis will explore how, within these particular Roth works, certain experiences of historical reversal bring despair and confusion to the heightened sense of collective national optimism that was generated by this once dominant liberal vision. I will look at the way the novels in question examine certain drastic transformations to the American political and cultural landscape, and how such changes have brought into doubt the important idea of commonality and citizenry that glues together the Rooseveltian liberal ideal. By reading these later Roth novels in this historicist fashion, I will suggest how they help to situate his oeuvre within a catastrophic narrative of national disillusionment and cultural fragmentation in post-war America.

In a self-interview that he conducted following the publication of *The Great American Novel*, Roth provides us with an early insight into how this wider national narrative of defeated liberal optimism has informed his writing. He pays particular attention to the challenges brought by the "demythologizing decade" (*Reading Myself and Others*, 81) of the sixties to the tradition of American political idealism that had appeared to find its apotheosis in the liberalism of Roosevelt. Roth argues that the events of this period gave rise to a situation in which much of "what was imagined to be indestructible, impermeable, in the very nature of American things, yielded and collapsed overnight" (81). What emerged powerfully for Roth from the sixties was "a counter-history, or *counter-mythology*" (82) that split the post-war American experience in two, creating what he describes as a: "*struggle* between the benign national myth of itself that a great power prefers to perpetuate, and the relentlessly insidious, very nearly

demonic reality (like the kind we had known in the sixties) that will not give an inch in behalf of that idealized mythology" (82-83). This calamitous experience of reversal in the "myth" of America as a bastion of progressive liberal values is repeatedly traced through archetypal images of postlapsarian chaos and disunity in the novels of the American trilogy and *The Plot against America*. In different ways, each of the main characters in these works finds himself displaced from the democratic endowments of a clearly defined narrative of American historical possibility, through which he has fashioned a heroic idealisation of his own life as an emancipated subject. As part of these experiences of humbling and loss, each protagonist is cast into the horrifying contingency and mutability of a chaotic "counter-history." In these particular Roth texts, varying forms of cultural and psychic dissonance are brought about by clashes between the liberal idea of a universally shared experience of historical progress in America and "the terrifyingly provisional nature of everything" (*The Human Stain*, 336) that comprises: "the history that isn't yet history, the history that the clock is now ticking off, the history proliferating as I write, accruing a minute at a time" (335). In a similar vein to this, Zuckerman describes the social and political unrest of the sixties in *American Pastoral* as an embodiment of "the indigenous American berserk" (86) that shatters the happy and ordered procession of events in the Swede's idyllic experience of early post-war America, in which "[e]verything always added up to something whole" (191). Likewise, for Philip in *The Plot against America*, "the unfolding of" certain "unforeseen" (113) catastrophes within the novel has the harrowing effect of disturbing the secure and peaceful sense of historical belonging that he and his Jewish family feels toward the predominantly Gentile nation under Roosevelt's New Deal.

The Challenges of Writing about Post-war American "reality"

The horrifying realisations made by characters in these novels that their lives are no longer clearly mapped within a triumphal myth of American progress, but are instead subject to the inchoate tangle of "unforeseen" events, can be understood in relation to a highly problematic experience of the 'real' within Roth's overall body of literature. In an

important and much cited essay that he wrote at the beginning of his career, entitled "Writing American Fiction," Roth outlines the difficulty for post-war writers in America to engage with a "social world [that] has ceased to be as suitable or as manageable a subject as it once may have been" (*Reading Myself and Others*, 114-5). Writing in 1960, he explains how the contemporary American author grapples "to understand, describe, and then make *credible* much of American reality … [t]he actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist" (110). This confused sense of an experiential and extra-literary world that no longer conforms to any recognisable sense of "reality," but which is instead populated by phenomena whose already fictive or "unreal-seeming" (123) qualities pose a serious challenge to the creative talents of the literary author, has been crucial to the development of Roth's aesthetic and worldview. Throughout much of what follows in my introduction, I will suggest how this difficult experience of the 'real' in post-war American life has posed several problems in relation to ideas of authorship and literary style within Roth's writing. Furthermore, as my succeeding chapters will illustrate, the postlapsarian view of America's displacement from a liberal ideal of common civic purpose into a diabolical state of cultural disharmony in Roth's later work provides a useful historical context in which to better understand this disorienting experience of an "American reality" that is no longer "manageable" or discernible in palpably 'real' terms.

In "Writing American Fiction," Roth bemoans the impact that "the writer's loss of the community - of what is *outside* himself - as subject" (120) has had upon post-war American writing. He explains how such an experience of social and cultural alienation has lead, in certain cases, to a sort of "literary onanism" (120) in which "[t]he writer thrusts before our eyes … *personality*, in all its separateness and specialness" (119). While he accepts that "the mystery of personality may be nothing less than a writer's ultimate concern" (119), Roth is concerned by this solipsistic and self-enclosed tendency in contemporary American writing, in which "the self can only be celebrated as it is excluded from society" (123). Unimpressed by the experiences of "joy" and "solace"

that certain writers find in a notion of the "self imagined as the only seemingly real thing in an unreal-seeming environment" (123), Roth invokes the need for the contemporary author to uphold the increasingly difficult task of carrying out "an imaginative assault upon the American experience" (113). In doing so, he suggests that literary artists should explore how the alienated condition of the authorial self is inescapably bound-up with and shaped by the "unreal" landscape of post-war cultural life, rather than as an "inviolable" and "powerful" (123) source of opposition to it. In its efforts to thus chart the difficult relationship between the writer of fiction and national public life in the post-war period, "Writing American Fiction" can be viewed in light of Roth's interest in literary realism as an aesthetic form that allows the author to develop a particular insight into the state of existing social and cultural conditions. Throughout the remainder of this introduction, I wish to examine how the strange and perplexing form of American "reality" that his essay charts has contributed significantly to certain complexities and divisions in Roth's development as a writer of realist prose. However, before discussing this subject further, I wish to draw on the work of two highly noted literary scholars in order to highlight what I mean by my rather generalised statement about the relationship of realism to wider issues of historical significance.

Of course, I am fully aware that "realism" is a constantly evolving and much contested generic literary term, the social and political relevance of which can vary greatly according to how it is defined and used. For example, Eric Auerbach's broad definition of realism as a mimetic form that has "developed in increasingly rich terms, in keeping with the constantly changing and expanding reality of modern life" (554), encompasses many variances in method and style. He discusses differing formal categories of realism, ranging between the "thoroughly historistic" (480) modes of Stendhal and Balzac, Flaubert's "aesthetic realism" (512), the "materialistic psychology" (512) of Zola's naturalism, and Woolf's modernist style of "unipersonal subjectivism" (536). Significantly in terms of my discussion on Roth and realism, Auerbach locates in the tradition of writing begun by Stendhal and Balzac an acute sense of engagement between the realist novel and historical experience: "the serious realism of modern times

cannot represent man otherwise than as embedded in a total reality, political, social, and economic, which is concrete and constantly evolving" (463). Whereas Auerbach sees this ''historistic'' style as one among a number of approaches within the realist tradition of the novel, George Lukacs argues that such a mode of writing is, in fact, the exclusive domain of realism. Unlike Auerbach, Lukacs carries out an outright attack on the rise of naturalism and experimental modernism for what he claims are the separate ways in which they have undermined the rich historical and political significance contained within the realist traditions of French and Russian literature. Lukacs argues that the European realist novel of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suitably explores "the concept of the complete human personality" (7) through its complex dramatisation of "the indissoluble connection between man as a private individual and man as a social being, as a member of a community" (8). As a Marxist intellectual who is interested in how the novel examines the many contradictions and conflicts of life under capitalism, Lukacs does not consider this notion of the "complete human personality" to be a static or naturalised entity, but as symptomatic of a particularly dense arrangement of historical forces which are – despite being grounded in very much real and objective conditions – always subject to fluctuation and change. Lukacs decries how both the "exclusive introspection" of certain modernist experimentations in style and the "exclusive extraversion" of naturalist writing have managed to "equally impoverish and distort [this complex historical] reality" (6). By contrast, he argues that the realist novel achieves a vision of "completeness" and "objective typicality" (6) by dramatising the historically changing, dialectical processes through which man relates to society.

In separate ways, each of these scholars helps to establish a broadly defined sense of how particular realist authors have attempted to portray historical life as both "concrete and constantly evolving" (Auerbach); "objective" and yet continually in a stage of dialectical process (Lukacs). Auerbach and Lukacs, therefore, confidently affirm the strengths of literary realism as a form that responds in malleable fashion to the continual changes in modern society. However, Roth is writing within a post-war American context in which the ability of the realist author to wield control over and give

aesthetic shape to the constantly modulating content of an "unreal-seeming environment" is brought under considerable pressure. Yet despite his sense of living in such a perplexing and apparently unreal world, Roth began his career in *Goodbye, Columbus*, *Letting Go* and *When She Was Good* by conforming to the conventions of this broad concept of a realist tradition that seeks to address and take measure of the milieu or environment in which the author writes. These early literary attempts to encompass and come to terms with social experience exist in clear tension with the contemporary American lives that they are trying to portray. In the novella "Goodbye, Columbus," for example, Neil Klugman's portrait of the Patimkin household reveals a banal suburban landscape that is inhabited by dull and flattened ciphers, and which continually refuses to disclose any sense of the rich and complex social life that his choice of narrative form might ordinarily expect to achieve. Discussing these fissures between a somewhat "unreal" subject matter and realistic style in Roth's early works, Donald Kartiganer argues that the lives explored within these texts provide the author with a means "of measuring and in some measure breaking through the traditional novelistic form that has brought them to life" (89). Yet although subject to a strain in these works that will become even more pronounced during subsequent developments in his writing, I would suggest that the realist imperative to address the ever-changing phenomena of contemporary America life persists throughout Roth's body of literature. As my argument develops, I will indicate how the problematic notion of reality that Roth outlines as being peculiar to his American cultural surroundings continues to demand close scrutiny in his fiction. Even though his attempts to write about American life in a conventional realist manner are constantly defied and confounded by its already fictive or unreal qualities, Roth remains deeply interested in the wider world of 'real' social forces and experiences. What this highly self-reflexive form of "realism" explores is an unrelenting aesthetic conflict in which the literary impulse to carry out an "imaginative assault" on aspects of 'real' life are forever in collision with an "actuality [that] is continually outdoing our talents" to transform it into a "credible" fiction.

What I have been trying to establish as Roth's somewhat compromised efforts to remain loyal to a certain tradition of politically and socially engaged realism is thrown into sharp contrast with a countervailing tendency in his writing toward a style of literature that asserts the absolute aesthetic autonomy of the writer and his work over the external phenomena of 'real' life. Roth's work explores how the literary realist quest to develop a certain verisimilar reproduction of life as it exists beyond the written page becomes somewhat thwarted in a cultural environment where "reality" appears to adopt its own varying modes of the "unreal." In a situation where our understanding and knowledge of actual experience has become thus increasingly unstable and impoverished, Roth's novels make the suggestion that literature itself might work as a rich and necessary surrogate for reality. There are countless examples in his work where the art of fiction is lionised as an expansive and heightened imaginative means by which to speculate upon what are, in strictly epistemological terms, the otherwise unfathomable phenomena of 'real' life. In *The Ghost Writer*, for instance, Zuckerman ponders how he has creatively altered or reinvented the actual events to which he has been merely a partial witness: "what *do* I know, other than what I can imagine?" (129). Similarly, in *The Counterlife*, after having learned about his brother, Henry's decision to undergo life-threatening heart surgery in order to regain his sexual potency and resume an extra-marital affair, Zuckerman seeks to unlock what he calls "the real wisdom of that predicament" (41) through the stratagems of writing. Consulting his detailed notes on the conversations that he has had with Henry about the affair and the possible implications of the proposed bypass operation, Zuckerman is described in his authorial role as: "straining more and more after an idea that would release those old notes from their raw factuality and transform them into a puzzle for his imagination to solve" (41-42). In this way, fiction, for both Zuckerman and Roth, works as "the means to imaginative release, to the exposure, revelation, and invention of life" (*The Anatomy Lesson*, 424). Outside of this fictional process, according to Zuckerman, our factual knowledge of what actually occurs remains desperately impaired.

The notion of fiction in Roth's work as an "obsessive reinvention of the real," in which "what-could-be … always [has] to top what-is" (*The Counterlife*, 247), is invoked by the high-formalist school of literary modernism that grew out of the American academic field of New Criticism. What this school of thought claims is that the creative structures inherent to literature furnish their own unique mode of knowledge or experience, autonomous from any epistemological formulations of a reality existing beyond the work of art itself. According to this argument, textual meaning is not shaped by matters of historical or authorial context, but derives solely from the internal aesthetic arrangements of literary form. Cleanth Brooks, one of the founders of New Criticism, has argued that literature is predicated upon "*being* an experience rather than any mere statement about experience or any mere abstraction from experience" (*The Well Wrought Urn*, 1365). As I will outline in greater detail in my next chapter on *I Married a Communist*, Roth's creative development was significantly influenced by certain New Critical ideas about form and tradition that dominated the field of academic literary thought in America during the early post-war period. I will discuss how New Criticism opposed itself directly to what it saw as the narrow political content of certain types of realist and, in particular, naturalist prose in America. This school of thought was bred by what Roth himself called a "salvationist literary ethos" (*Reading Myself and Others*, 71), according to which well-honed works of literature furnish an exclusive understanding of mankind's fundamental predicament that transcends the mutable and discordant phenomena of actual social life. In Roth's fiction, this almost pious search for new understandings and heightened revelations about life involves the author's struggle to impose some sort of aesthetic order or design upon the mundane "facts" of existence: "to wield the whip over the facts to make real life amazing" (*The Facts*, 7).

Particularly relevant to the present study, the collection of nine Zuckerman books – of which the American trilogy and *Exit Ghost* comprise almost half – continually examines how Roth's aesthetic is informed by this exalted notion of literary form. In the first of these novels, *The Ghost Writer*, the young Zuckerman undertakes a literary pilgrimage to the home of E.I. Lonoff, a renowned Jewish-American author who lives

and writes in self-imposed isolation from the day to day world of social existence. This ascetic style of living is central to Lonoff's ideal of literature as a "gruelling, exalted, transcendent calling" (*The Ghost Writer*, 4) that takes place at a disinterested remove from the prosaic and non-literary concerns of the self and wider society. Foregoing all notions of corporeal pleasure or distraction for the more elevated rituals of writing, the elder artist appears to have ceased to live as a material subject in the 'real' world. As he declares to Zuckerman: "my 'self' … happens not to exist in the everyday sense of the word" (30). Lonoff's high-aesthetic sense of purpose thus reflects aspects of Roth's statement in *The Facts* about his New Critical induction into the hallowed realm of serious literature: "I was educated to believe that the independent reality of the fiction is all there is of importance and that writers should remain in the shadows" (4).

In *The Ghost Writer* and throughout the rest of the Zuckerman novels, this venerable notion of literary fiction as "transcendent" of 'real' life is something that Roth's protagonist both aspires to achieve and yet fails to successfully uphold. Despite the declared "love for the bluntness, the scrupulosity, the severity, the estrangement … the relentless winnowing out of the babyish, preening, insatiable self" (*The Ghost Writer*, 41) that Zuckerman discovers in Lonoff's dedication to art, he himself is unable to discard as superfluous the claims that aspects of his personal life and social predicament make upon his writing. I will examine key facets of this important conflict below by introducing examples of the difficulty with which Zuckerman has had to defend his artistic prerogative to modulate the actual experiences of both himself and others against countervailing accusations that he is committing "a ridiculous travesty of the facts" (*The Counterlife*, 226). I will also look at how his somewhat chastened efforts to locate himself among a coterie of "superior artist[s]" who "are able to loosen and make ambiguous their connection to real life through the imposition of talent" (210) find a connection with equally conflicted notions of cultural identity for Zuckerman. Describing fiction writing as a process that "sweep[s] away the limits on life" (235), Zuckerman seeks to escape the narrow confines of his own biographical circumstances and reinvent for himself a more expansive and liberating sense of origin or identity

through literature. However, this notion of authorial autonomy and individual self-authorship that Zuckerman elicits from formalist principles about literature is brought into considerable friction with certain external or pre-authored notions of cultural origins, most particularly those associated with his Jewish upbringing.

Ross Posnock argues that the rarefied ideal of literary autonomy championed by American New Critics is defended and upheld throughout Roth's work. Determined to dismiss "pigeonholing critics who would anchor him [Roth] to his historical coordinates" (2006, xiii), Posnock argues that "Roth embraces a modernism of Promethean heroism," in which the primacy of the "individual author" (50) over the deterministic bent of literary historicism and fixed notions of identity politics is clearly emphasised. In arguing thus, he adds that, in his "flaunted insouciance about the sanctity of the real" (xvi), Roth has shown an "irreverent attitude toward realism" (xviii). Other critics, however, have shown how traces of a realist aesthetic remain ingrained in Roth's fiction, even as it is drawn to the greater range of stylistic experimentation associated with literary modernism and, in some arguments, postmodernism. Bernard Rodgers, for example, reads Roth's early writing in terms of its formal reaction to the unruly experience of American reality after World War Two. He has traced a development in Roth's work from a form of "traditional realism with a moral emphasis" in the first three publications, to more "Kafkaesque tales which vividly convey the confluence of the real and the fantastic in the quotidian" (10) of contemporary life. This development has not resulted in an abandonment or rejection of realist fiction for Rodgers, but signals instead a gradual expansion of the bounds of "traditional realism" in works such as *The Breast* and *My Life as a Man*. For Debra Shostak, Roth's formal style moves forward and back across what she sees as the three main developmental stages of the novel form: conventional realism, modernist experimentation and postmodernist playfulness. She argues that the "credibility" of his verisimilar "stance in relation to 'the world'" (188) remains consistent in Roth's use of all three modes. In contrast to Posnock, Shostak asserts that "Roth has striven for verisimilitude even in his most metafictionally playful moments" (188) as a postmodern stylist. In a slightly different spirit, Stephen Wade has

attempted to show how Roth's attachment to "experimental modernism" takes place alongside and is enmeshed with a literary tradition of "didactic realism" (15). According to Wade, this "didactic element, the need to explain to oneself and therefore to extend a process of reasoning and interrogation to the reader" (23), has persisted in Roth's work through the many tensions that he establishes between "the private self" (22) and broader politico-cultural forces in post-war American life. Like Shostak, Wade is keen to stress that, even as Roth's fiction moves beyond modernism toward postmodernist metafiction, the "didactic" desire to understand the (authorial) self in relation to broader social phenomena remains of foremost importance within his work.

As I already hinted, and will discuss at greater length later on in a more extensive treatment of Roth's critical heritage, this question of the relative status of realism is central to how readers have tried to relate his work to wider American social and cultural experiences. According to many critics, Roth's persistent interrogation of the relationship between the fictive and the 'real' has produced a movement away from his earlier efforts to emulate traditional realism and toward the more interiorised, self-reflexive literary concerns with form and voice that are often characteristic of high-modernism and postmodernism. In the pages that follow, I will indicate how modernist-formalist notions about the sovereign autonomy of literature are challenged in Roth's fiction by the peculiar manner in which aspects of 'real' life impose an external influence upon the private realm of the author's imagination. The particular novels studied in this thesis help to make clear how these significant creative tensions in Roth's work have stemmed from his interaction with the contingent and chaotic reality of the post-war American scene in which he writes.

The "intractable" Stuff of 'Real' Life

In an argument that shares clear parallels with those of American New Critics, T.S. Eliot has explained how a disciplined commitment to the nuanced practices of high-literary form allows the author to achieve a creative mastery over the "objective

correlative" of his artistic content.[1] In contrast with Eliot's argument, Roth's idea of a somewhat improbable or self-fictionalising American reality somewhat corrodes such a vaunted notion of the literary author who imposes his own unique thumb-print upon the otherwise inert subject material of his work. In one sense, fiction is heralded in Roth's work as a means "to claim, exploit, enlarge, and reconstruct" (*The Anatomy Lesson*, 323) what is given as 'real.' However, the challenge "to invent as presumptuously as real life" (*The Ghost Writer*, 87) that Zuckerman and Roth's other fictional surrogates continually face helps to compromise this heroic concept of the author as undeniable master of his work. For example, in *My life as a Man*, Peter Tarnopol's determination "to find in everyday experience the same sense of the difficult and the deadly earnest that informed the novels I admired most" (194) meets comic frustration with a married life that reflects "something serialized on afternoon TV" (101). Tarnopol's repeatedly failed efforts to find within literature a mode of existence that might transcend the decidedly low-brow squalor of his domestic situation finds further examination through the plight of the literary author in *Zuckerman Unbound*. In this novel, Zuckerman's efforts to engage with and write about contemporary American life in the sixties are made difficult by the endless barrage of implausible fictions that are evolving from the "stupendous *vrai*" (230) of a "haywire country" (221) in which, he informs us, "many … had gone berserk" (138). In particular, Zuckerman's position as literary author faces various challenges from the proliferation of competing fictions that are produced about both himself and his work by the ''haywire'' responses of a mass readership to his bestseller, *Carnovsky*. Thrust instantly into the role of celebrity by the salacious sexual content of this particular novel – a thinly veiled reference to Roth's own *Portnoy's Complaint* – Zuckerman is bombarded by the steadfast claims and ribald suggestions of a public determined to confuse the libidinal adventures of his protagonist with the 'real' life of the author: "[t]hey had mistaken impersonation for confession and were calling out to a character who lived in a book" (140). Having once "believed everything Aristotle taught

[1] In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot discusses how the work of serious literature is defined by the writer's "continual surrender of himself" to the objective and immutable standards of canonical literary form, which take absolute precedence over questions of biographical or historical content: "[t]he progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (1094).

me about [how] literature" (199) imitates experience in order to move and affect its audience in a certain controlled way, Zuckerman is left dumbfounded by the manner in which his own life and writing are now made subject to the (authorial) manipulations of his readers: "Aristotle ... didn't mention anything about the theater of the ridiculous in which I am now a leading character – because of literature" (199-200).

The contingent and self-generating fictions assumed by extra-literary experience in Roth's work thus serve as examples of an obdurate 'real' in contemporary American culture, which challenges the modernist-formalist ideal of literature as something that transforms and heightens our experience of the world. Yet, such difficult obstacles to literary authorship also function as key forces of antagonism, against which Roth's various author-protagonists continue to pit their struggle to impose a uniquely aesthetic design upon life. This difficult and highly antagonistic sense of extra-literary experience is suggestive of what Peter Tarnopol yearned for as the experience of "intractability" central to the writing of "serious fiction" (*My life as a Man*, 195). Tarnopol's anguished sense of married life as having all "the intractability of soap opera" (195) – rather than providing him with a desired for "intractable existence" that "take[s] place at an appropriately lofty moral altitude, an elevation somewhere, say, between *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Wings of the Dove*" (195) – epitomises the manner in which actuality and literature clash in Roth's work. The circumstances of married existence fail to match what Tarnopol calls "[m]y model of reality, deduced from reading the masters" (194) of canonical literature. As a result of the gross disparity between his literary "model of reality" and the less exalted aspects of his domestic environment, Tarnopol's attempts "to introduce the story [of his marriage] into a work of fiction" are subject to repeatedly exasperated attempts at "transform[ing] low actuality into high art" (208). It is this experience of an "intractable" conflict between 'life' and 'art' as rival modes of authorship that, paradoxically, both frustrates and engenders the narrative quest to reinvent what is 'real' in Roth's fiction.

Tarnopol's troubled experience with a reality that is unwilling to be translated into elevated literary terms finds added resonance in the recurring accusations made against Zuckerman for stealing from or cannibalising the lives of both himself and others in his writing. Zuckerman is constantly faced by impeaching declarations against his position as author over claims that he has betrayed or distorted 'real' life for the purposes of fiction. For example in *The Counterlife*, Henry accuses his brother of being "a pure cannibal" (238) in his insatiable desire to appropriate as material and then contort into fiction the intimate details of other people's private existence: "[e]veryone buried and mummified in that verbal lava, including finally himself – nothing straightforward, unvarnished, directly alive, nothing faced up to as it actually is" (232). It is against such assured notions of what life "actually is" that Zuckerman is made to continually re-assert the highly speculative purpose of fiction as a means of exploring "what-could-be" (*The Counterlife*, 247). Yet in constantly having to wage this argument about the power of literature to transcend actual life and transform it into something new, Zuckerman's writing is ironically drawn back upon the moral and aesthetic implications of its relationship to the "facts." Furthermore, in having to challenge and dispel the multitude of fictions about himself that are spawned by *Carnovsky*, Zuckerman is forced to go back over the very subject of personal biography from which he has sought release through the creative act of writing literature. In this fashion, Zuckerman's biographical self – similar to the case of Tarnopol's domestic life – functions as yet another aspect of lived reality that is being revised and authored in a manner which is beyond his authorial control as a literary artist. This constantly evolving and fictive sense of extra-literary reality in Roth's fiction thus works to undermine any absolutist notion of the author's creative autonomy from and mastery over 'real' life experiences.

The Conflict with Jewish Origins

Roth's fiction can be thus said to develop out of a paradoxical conflict in which literature both engages with and borrows from the strangely "intractable" experience of

reality peculiar to post-war American life, while at the same time trying to gain a formalist aesthetic distance from and mastery over the same. In one sense, this is a situation that involves a certain collapsing of the distance that makes distinguishable life from literature; fact from fiction; biography from literary authorship. Yet at the same time, this peculiar admixture of opposites is also fused by a distinct sense of separation and antagonism between the 'real' and the imaginary that is essential to Roth's fiction. As Maria in *The Counterlife* suggests, the extra-literary modes and expressions of 'real' life that seriously challenge his creative efforts to re-conceive the facts as fiction are also, paradoxically, what mobilise Zuckerman's art into action in the first place: "[y]ou're just dying … for a collision, a clash – anything as long as there's enough antagonism to get the story smoking and everything exploding in the wrathful philippics that you adore" (316). Nowhere is this sense in which "[o]pposition determines your direction" (*The Counterlife*, 188) more evident than in the treatment of Jewish-American subjectivity in Roth's novels. In particular, the *Zuckerman Bound* collection explores the personal and literary travails faced by Zuckerman as a result of damning accusations made against his fictional portrayal of Jewish family and community life. In *The Ghost Writer*, for example, Zuckerman is compelled to defend the integrity of his art in response to the anxieties expressed by both his father and a local Rabbi over how his portrayal of Jews might confirm certain anti-Semitic stereotypes among a Gentile readership. It is against this backdrop of rebuke from his own father and others over a perceived ''betrayal'' (69) of ethnic loyalties that Zuckerman makes his literary pilgrimage to the home of Lonoff, in an attempt to gain from "the great man" (3) of letters an alternative source of paternal advocacy for his art: "I had come … to submit myself for candidacy as nothing less than E. I. Lonoff's spiritual son" (7).

What Lonoff and his writing represent for Zuckerman is a proven example of how literature can take as its subject the parochial life of a Jewish community and illuminate upon the heightened experiences of a common humanity that lay therein:

> The typical hero of a Lonoff story … some ten years after Hitler, seemed to say something new and wrenching to Gentiles about Jews, and to Jews about themselves, and to readers and writers of that

> recuperative decade generally about the ambiguities of prudence and the anxieties of disorder, about life-hunger, life-bargains, and life-terror in their most elementary manifestations (10)

Lonoff's artistic ingenuity lies for Zuckerman in how he extrapolates from his Jewish subject matter a clear sense of "life" in all its "elementary manifestations." Zuckerman appeals to this laudatory notion of fiction as a means of expanding upon the otherwise narrow limits of 'real' life in an attempt to defend his literary appropriation of characters and stories from the localised existence of his Newark upbringing. This aesthetic argument is one that Roth himself had made in response to various criticisms – closely similar to those aimed at Zuckerman – against the portrayal of Jews in his early fiction:

> I had informed on the Jews. I had told the Gentiles what apparently it would otherwise have been possible to keep secret from them: that the perils of human nature afflict the members of our minority (*Reading Myself and Others*, 146)

By identifying with a "history of novelists infuriating fellow countrymen and friends" (*The Ghost Writer*, 79), Zuckerman aligns himself with a notion of literary tradition and culture that far exceeds the regional ethnic concerns of his father and Rabbi Wapter in the novel. Like Lonoff, he sees the art of fiction as a means of transcending the particular and transforming it into an expression of something more profound and immutable. Yet despite his youthful desire to abandon the restrictions of family and home for the (self-) liberating experience of art, the demanding burden of origins placed upon him by his Jewish father is something that Zuckerman cannot easily surmount without a huge amount of personal guilt and suffering: "[i]t wasn't Flaubert's father or Joyce's father who had impugned me for my recklessness – it was my own" (80). In *The Ghost Writer*, and throughout the novels that follow it, Roth explores how the notion of the literary artist as one whom, like Lonoff, lives and works at a distant remove from the insular purview of his community is made difficult for Zuckerman by these damning accusations of betrayal and disloyalty. The debate over the Jewish subject matter of his early fiction is similar to how other external notions of reality impinge upon Zuckerman's efforts to creatively reinvent what is given or 'real.' In attempting to defend his artistic method against the scandalised and irate reactions of certain Jewish

readers, Zuckerman's writing is brought uncannily back to the very site of ethnic origins from which he had sought an escape through literature in the first place.

This particular form of confrontation with 'real' life is re-enacted throughout Roth's body of literature by characters who, in attempting to discover a greater sense of cultural belonging beyond their particular background as Jews, are brought into conflict with varying recalcitrant notions of Jewish historical specificity and ethnic exclusivity. For example, Alex Portnoy attempts to liberate himself from what he sees as the burdensome "saga of the suffering Jews" by defiantly exclaiming to his father: "stick your suffering heritage up your suffering ass - *I happen also to be a human being!*" (*Portnoy's Complaint*, 76). However, as his struggles throughout the novel make evident, Portnoy's claim to a deracinated and universal humanist notion of subjectivity is crippled by the sense of social restriction and psychological inhibition that has been ingrained in him by his Jewish upbringing. His frustrated efforts to escape his Jewish parents and author the self anew find a correlate with ideas of literary authorship in the case of Zuckerman. The latter's resistance to the Zionist arguments about Jewish tribal allegiance to which his brother Henry has become enthralled in *The Counterlife* is contrasted with his own inability to blanch himself of his sense of ethnic marginality and difference while living in England alongside his new lover, Maria. In this novel, Zuckerman is at pains to prioritise the imaginative play of narrative (self-) reinvention over the idea of a Jewish historical imperative to which Henry and his new cohort of zealots have committed themselves. However, he soon discovers that his attempt to remodel his life and transplant himself among the remnants of the old landed elite of England is doomed to bitter strife and division over his growing sense of exclusion, as a Jew, from his new environment. While he suggests to her the "possib[ility] that neither of us can control this old, old stuff" (309) of historical prejudice and acute cultural differences, Maria lambastes what she sees as Zuckerman's paranoid notion of an "International Gentile Conspiracy" (304) for being a form of dogma about Jewish ethnicity that is no less outrageous to her than Henry's Zionism. What this episode from *The Counterlife* adequately displays is the extent to which Zuckerman has retained and

internalised the exclusive sense of Jewish ethnic belonging that censorious figures such as his father and Judge Wapter had previously expressed in opposition to his youthful ideas about literature and self-transformation.

Roth himself has argued that, despite the anger and frustrations which it aroused, the early "conflict with my Jewish critics was as valuable a struggle as I could have had at the outset of my career" (*Reading Myself and Others*, 72). He discusses "the irritant" that such an "attentive audience … provides … by its collective (therefore simplistic) sense of the writer" and "the uses it wants to make of selective, disconnected elements of his work" (73). Such narrow perceptions of Roth's literature threaten to undermine any sense of the sovereignty by which the literary artist and his work exist in isolation from the world of social attachments and allegiances. Yet according to Roth, this outraged Jewish audience have also served as a useful form of "antagonistic opposition," helping to re-invigorate his already charged sense of resistance to the influences of the greater world beyond literature: "the amiable irritant is useful insomuch as it arouses whatever is stubborn, elusive, or even defiant in the writer's nature, whatever resents being easily digested" (73). This paradoxical experience of Jewish subjectivity as both "irritant" and inspiration within Roth's writing is suitably demonstrated by Zuckerman's ongoing aesthetic and personal plight. Like Roth, Zuckerman can never fully abandon the charges that he has betrayed his Jewish origins. Nor can he find a simple form of rapprochement with his inherited ethnic identity. Like other experiences of the 'real' in his writing, he is both attached to and separated from the concept of a Jewish origin; it is what both frustrates and stimulates, in cyclical and self-perpetuating fashion, his determination to broaden the boundaries of 'real' life within fiction. In each chapter that follows, I will discuss further how this conflicted experience of Jewish origins in Roth's work calls into question New Critical ideas about how literature transcends its immediate or particular social context. In addition, I will examine how the complex Jewish-American experiences of Roth's characters also make problematic the universalising impulses within the American liberal ideology of Roosevelt and his successors.

As the disagreements over Zuckerman's fictional depiction of Jews suggest, the rejection of paternal wisdom or law is necessary to creative acts of (self-) authorship for Roth. Like Zuckerman, characters such as Portnoy, David Kepesh of *The Professor of Desire*, "Philip Roth" in *The Plot against America* and Marcus Messner of the recently published *Indignation* are typically defined by their longing for self-liberation from a home life ruled by the smothering protections and proscriptive warnings of Jewish parents, most notably fathers. In *The Ghost Writer*, Zuckerman attempts to replace his father with a surrogate in the form of Lonoff, thereby substituting his "unliterary origins" as the son of second generation, lower middle-class Jewish-Americans for the more "transcendent calling" (3) that he discovers in a certain high-literary tradition of writing. Yet the need to counter accusations that he has betrayed his Jewish family in his fiction means that Zuckerman is unable to achieve the level of poise and self-transcendence that is displayed by the reclusive literary master, Lonoff. As a result, his fiction not only involves a perceived betrayal of his Jewish father, but it is also at odds with Lonoff's concept of literature as existing at a distant remove from 'real' life. As one who has thus broken ranks with both his actual father and his surrogate, Lonoff, Zuckerman is to some degree free of any weighted sense of an external origin acting upon and directing his art. At the same time, he is somewhat bereft of any clear starting point or fixed cultural tradition from which his writing might draw some source of authority. Yet instead of it being a question of either simply adhering to or rejecting their guiding influences, it is possible to view Zuckerman's disputations with both his father and Lonoff as involving two distinct, yet related moments of antagonism to which his fiction obsessively returns. He is continually drawn back toward these paternal figures that he has in different ways disowned, in an attempt to understand the aesthetic and personal implications of his conflicts with them. Like the notion of an "amiable irritant" or "intractable" reality that I have already discussed, the Jewish father in particular stands as an obstacle to the activity of literary authorship for Zuckerman, while at the same time providing a vital source of opposition from which all of his efforts to reinvent notions of the 'real' or origin emerge. As Roth spells out in "Writing and the Powers that

Be," his resistance to or severance with the "attachments" that had formed his early life has provided a paradoxical basis (origin) for his art: "I have greatly refashioned my attachments through the effort of testing them, and over the years have developed my strongest attachment to the test itself" (*Reading Myself and Others*, 9).

Trauma and the Experience of American History

The unexpected displacement of characters in Roth's later fiction from an assured and purposeful sense of American historical progress into a bewildering knowledge of the 'real' as chaotic and uncertain can be read in the context of recent studies on the psychological experience of trauma. Trauma has been discussed by various scholars as a psychological experience of shock in response to an event of colossal misfortune, the magnitude of which exceeds the survivor's capacity to fully comprehend what has occurred. For example, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as: "the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge" (1995, 153). Elsewhere, Shoshana Felman has described it in terms of "a horror or illness whose effects explode any capacity for explanation or rationalization" (4). According to Dori Laub, the insensible experience of trauma marks "an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence" (57). Caruth also describes how this sense of temporal dislocation functions within traumatic memory. She explains that, as a result of the paradoxical "inaccessibility of its occurrence" (1995, 8), the moment of trauma is constantly re-visited by and repeated for the victim, in an effort to make its difficult "reality" fully known to consciousness: "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature - the way that it was precisely *not known* in the first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on" (1996, 4). Although the trauma belatedly makes itself known to the traumatised through these disjunctive moments of recall, the full horror of the original event can never be absorbed within the limits of consciousness. Trauma, therefore, takes the paradoxical form of an event that is never

fully experienced or made real to its victim, yet which, in its overwhelming insistence to become known, is subject to endless instances of haunting repetition: "[w]hile the trauma uncannily returns in actual life, its reality continues to elude the subject who lives in its grip and unwittingly undergoes its ceaseless repetitions and re-enactments" (Felman and Laub, 68-9).

Not only does the de-stabilising effect of trauma have drastic psychological repercussions, but it also throws into chaos the survivor's efforts to recoup the past within some coherent form of narrative representation. As Laub suggests: "[t]he traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of 'normal' reality … outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery" (69). Felman attests to a similar notion of trauma as an unruly and ceaselessly mutating experience that outstrips conventional modes of narrative understanding. She explains how the recounting of trauma involves an act of "testimony [that] seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not yet settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference" (5). Trauma, according to Felman, finds expression in testimonial recollections which convey the sense of an event that "has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect" (69). The acts of testimony by which traumatic memories are explored, therefore, make known the poverty of their own narrative efforts to possess the overbearingly horrific event. As Caruth explains, it is only through the "paradoxical … transmission of a gap" (1995, 156) that trauma narratives can open "the space for a testimony that can speak beyond what is already understood" (1995, 155).

This idea of trauma as an actual occurrence that is impossible to fully know and yet which continues to make its delayed and incomplete presence known to the victim is resonant of Roth's struggle to grasp a sense of what is 'real' in his writing. In the novels that I have chosen to read for this thesis, various experiences of reversal brought to the

liberal narrative of American progress are dramatised as moments of inconceivable or "unreal" trauma which have left Roth's characters stranded within a world that has become radically estranged and incomprehensible to them. Such instances of "unforeseen" shock within American historical experience are closely associated with the manner in which ethnicity functions in Roth's work. Determined to bury all wounded knowledge of their suffering ethnic (or racial, as in the case of *The Human Stain*'s Coleman Silk) ancestry, Roth's protagonists in these novels discover for themselves a more liberating sense of American cultural identity through certain universalising creeds of political progressivism. Yet as an "irritant" that constantly returns and refuses to go away, these characters are belatedly confronted by the injurious and self-dividing experiences of marginalised origins from which they have sought flight. In Roth's later novels, the painful history of ethnic exclusion in America thus takes the form of a re-visited trauma that had been repressed within a progressive-liberal ideal of common national identity. Such forgotten traumatic experience is explored by Roth in each text in terms of how its delayed effects impact detrimentally upon the myth of national cohesion and togetherness that had prevailed in America at mid-century.

Writing as a Movement between Death and Desire

Roth's interest in trauma as an overwhelming experience of pain and self-division is directly linked to the relationship between desire and modes of authorship in his fiction. Uncontrollable eruptions of rage and libidinal yearning are closely paralleled in his work as emotional responses to traumatic experiences of vulnerability, loss and death. Portnoy's unrelenting anger over the various social fears and ethical prohibitions – "[t]he watch-its and the be-carefuls!" (34) – that have been imprinted on him by his Jewish parents, for example, finds an expression in his manic search for sexual satisfaction. This nexus of rage and sexual hunger functions for Portnoy as his means of trying – albeit failing – to overcome the irremediable and recurring sense of traumatic lack associated with his Jewish origins. Explaining to Dr. Spielvogel how he has attempted to escape the moral and psychological restrictions of his childhood through

illicit acts of masturbation and sex, Portnoy describes his penis as his "[b]attering ram to freedom" (33). Phallic desire is therefore linked to a yearning for complete authorship over the self that stems from Portnoy's gaping sense of incompletion or self-division as an American Jew. In *Sabbath's Theater*, Mickey Sabbath's insatiable compulsion for erotic encounters operates as a reflex to the traumatic experiences of death that have punctuated his life. Described as having "clear[ed] a space in the world where he could exist as antagonistically as he liked" (444), Sabbath's sexual instincts, like those of Portnoy, are correlated with his angered defiance towards the prurient inhibitions of society. Furthermore, by linking Sabbath's sexual adventures to his instinct for irreverent and transgressing forms of theatrical improvisation, this novel provides a useful example of how aesthetic authorship and erotic longing are connected in Roth's fiction as a means of dealing with the limitations imposed on life by trauma and loss.

The case of Zuckerman provides the best example of how writing and desire operate in mutuality for Roth. As I have suggested above, the resistant obstacles and competing fictions that face Zuckerman and threaten to undermine his role as author function as aspects of a traumatised cultural reality in Roth's work. Zuckerman's constant struggle to dominate and imaginatively reconstruct 'real' life is pitted against the crippling possibility that his writing might be made passive or obedient to external notions of reality or fact. This conflict with outside influences and forces at the heart of Zuckerman's notion of literary invention is represented in erotic terms as a struggle for potency over impotence. Describing Henry's "impotence … [as being] like an artist's artistic life drying up for good" (35), Zuckerman explores this struggle between literary authorship – as an erotically charged mode of reinventing what is 'real' about the self and others – and the impotent and passive acceptance of already determined "facts" in *The Counterlife*. Having learned that the failing libido caused by Henry's heart medication has brought about an abrupt and tormenting end to a secret affair with his dental assistant, Zuckerman contemplates how: "[i]mpotence … has cut him off from the simplest form of distance from his predictable life … without the potency he feels condemned to an ironclad life wherein all issues are settled" (30). With his erotic desire

to escape the "predictable life" of marriage, home and children vanquished, Henry has "been thrown back on his talent for the prosaic, precisely what he'd been boxed in by all his life" (35). Having read the draft of Nathan's fictional account of his affair, Henry is outraged by the suggestion that his sexual infidelity might be construed in self-transformative terms as a "way out of his life or as an escape from the facts" (234). Henry does not claim to share with his brother the same notion of the erotic as a means of self-reinvention. Instead, he is made content by: "*living* with the facts – instead of trying to alter the facts, taking the facts and letting them inundate him" (234). Having eventually given up "chasing erotic daydreams," Henry comes to see such flights of "fantasy" as indicative of the "[e]xaggeration, falsification, [and] rampant caricature" (235) by which Nathan has mendaciously betrayed the "facts" for fiction. As with Portnoy and Sabbath, therefore, Zuckerman many efforts to imaginatively enlarge "the limits on life" and transform his own existence are connected to notions of libidinal potency. What I have earlier referred to as Zuckerman's persistent need to collide with and antagonise competing or "irritant" notions of the 'real' in his fiction pairs together erotic desire with aggressive rage in a manner that is also shared by both Portnoy and Sabbath. This enraged need of the author to oppose and gain dominance over others in order to impose his artistic signature upon life finds expression through Zuckerman's various outbursts against those, particularly his father, who had tried to set limits for him as a young man.

This idea of the relationship between trauma, desire and writing in Roth's fiction finds a useful form of explication in the narratological theory of Peter Brooks. Brooks describes "desire as that which is initiatory of narrative, motivates and energizes its reading, and animates the combinatory play of sense-making" (48). Taking his model of desire from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Brooks sets out to explore the narratological implications of what he calls "the paradoxical logic of Freud's essay: that Eros is subtended by the death instinct, the drive of living matter to return to the

quiescence of the inorganic, a state prior to life" (51).[2] According to this view, desire or Eros is initiated as a psychological response to the knowledge of (and unconscious longing for) non-being: Thanatos. However, the erotic desire to overcome death is never satisfied, but is continually informed by a contradictory experience of Thanatos. In this sense, Eros and Thanatos are paradoxically opposed and interdependent at the same time; the death drive is that which both initiates and threatens to vanquish desire. Drawing from this Freudian model, Brooks sees the yearning for consummation within desire as marking a movement toward its own completion or death. He describes this as a notion of "desire whose lack of satisfaction gives death as the only alternative, but whose satisfaction would also be death" (58). This longing for satisfaction or expiration within desire, according to Brooks, finds its correlate in the narrative urge toward meaning: "[i]f the motor of narrative is desire, totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning, the ultimate determinants of meaning lie *at the end*, and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire *for* the end" (52). He goes on to argue that the paradoxical relationship between Eros and Thanatos is characterised by "the contradictory desire of narrative, driving toward the end which would be both its destruction and its meaning" (58). Brooks suggests that "with the possibility of total realization of desire, the self encounters the impossibility of desiring, because to desire becomes … the choice of death of that same self" (51). Any "totalizing" order of signification, therefore, would involve the self-annihilation of desire/narrative. As a result, the productive antagonism between death and desire in narrative does not find "the end." Instead, it leads to an un-ending "process of desiring and dying" (53).

For Roth, Eros and Thanatos are closely commingled in a way that reflects Brooks' understanding of the Freudian dynamics of narrative. As I have already discussed, Zuckerman's determination to re-imagine the 'real' within literature is

[2] In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Freud outlines a line of distinction and productive anatgonism between what he calls "two kinds of instincts: those which seek to lead what is living to death, and others, the sexual instincts, which are perpetually attempting and achieving a renewal of life" (252). He explores in an expansive and probing manner how the longing for inertia or death – "to restore an earlier state of things" (266) – informs, to different degrees, both of these contradictory instincts.

defined by an oscillating interplay between conflicting experiences of potency (Eros) and impotence (Thanatos). Similarly, Portnoy's libidinal yearning to define the self outside of the restrictive cultural, moral and psychological boundaries set by his Jewish background is shadowed by the threat of castration. Also, for Sabbath the twin erotic joys of theatricality and sex are constantly made transient by his heightened awareness of death. Brooks describes narrative as "the thrust of a desire that never can quite speak its name – never can quite come to the point – but that insist upon speaking over and over again its movement toward that name" (61). In ways that closely mirror this statement, Zuckerman is driven by an indefatigable urge to conquer and re-possess the "facts" within fiction that finds neither completion nor exhaustion. He is forced to constantly wage conflict with resistant and crude notions of the 'real' that threaten to render him impotent as a literary author, while at the same time restraining – or being restrained in – his desire for a form of complete authorial dominance (absolute potency) which might bring his fictional assault upon actual life to a finality (death). It is this relentless struggle between libidinal joy and anguished frustration that propels Zuckerman's artistic ambition. By contrast, the notion of the "pastoral" (322) as a site of uncomplicated erotic fulfilment in *The Counterlife*, devoid of the thanatological complications of desire, comes to represent a deadening form of stasis and sterility for Zuckerman. Described by him as "the perfectly safe, charmingly simple and satisfying environment that is desire's homeland," he explains how the pastoral "cannot admit contradiction or conflict" (*The Counterlife*, 322). It is against such an idyllic notion of fulfilment and completion that Zuckerman's literary re-invention of the 'real' is characterised in terms of an inexorable and irreconcilable conflict between Eros and Thanatos.

The paradoxical structure of narrative desire in Roth's fiction helps to explain what I have earlier referred to as its contradictory sense of being both attached to and, at the same time, separated from 'real' life. Although his various characters seek an erotic/aesthetic release from the determining "facts" of their lives, they are never able to fully transcend the limits and entrapments of such prescribed notions of reality. Instead

of a complete separation from and mastery over the facts, Zuckerman undertakes what he calls a literary "impersonation" (*The Counterlife*, 320) of 'real' life. In *The Counterlife*, he develops upon this idea of fiction and impersonation by contrasting it with the "pastoral" innocence of "*being oneself*" (319). Zuckerman insists that artifice and disguise lay at the heart of all notions of "natural being," explaining to Maria that the idea of living a "real, authentic, or genuine life" has, for him, "all the aspects of a hallucination" (320). Such claims to "an irreducible self," according to Zuckerman, merely involve their own form of pretence and impersonation: "pretending that it isn't a performance but you" (320). As one of his many artistic disguises, Zuckerman gives voice to Roth's notion of literature as an expansive and endless erotic pursuit of a reality that can never be fully re-claimed, other than as an improvised fiction. This notion of improvisation or impersonation runs straight through Roth's idea of fiction as a means of reinventing the 'real.' It suggests a kind of amplification or "exaggeration" – to use Henry's term of indictment against his brother – of lives and events, which involves a contradictory mixture of fidelity to and distortion of the facts.

Describing himself as "a theater and nothing more than a theater," Zuckerman adopts multiple forms of "imposturing" (*The Counterlife*, 321) disguise as a means of exploring the fictional possibilities of an otherwise incomprehensible 'real.' Yet at the same time, his inability to satisfy or nullify the erotic pursuit of narrative meaning creates a sort of prison out of desire/fiction. Zuckerman's chastening ordeal of physical pain and literary paralysis in *The Anatomy Lesson* provides a telling example of how fiction serves as both an erotic form of liberation from determinate concepts of reality, while also involving a thanatological experience of futility and impotence. Having sought in fiction the means "to spring myself from everything that had held me captive as a boy" (368), Zuckerman finds himself, at aged forty, trapped in a labyrinthine series of narrative improvisations which have left him painfully divorced from any sense of a 'real' existence outside of literature. As Roth's third person voice explains: "[o]nly gradually [for Zuckerman] did the perfecting of a writer's iron will begin to feel like the evasion of experience, and the means to imaginative release … like the sternest form of

incarceration" (424-5). Zuckerman is thus left pining for an existence outside of the prison house of fiction:

> I want an active connection to life and I want it now. I want an active connection to *myself*. I'm sick of channeling everything into writing. I want the real thing, the thing *in the raw*, and not for the writing but for itself (442)

Yet despite his anguish over how literature has abstracted him from "the real thing[s]" of life, Zuckerman is unable to free himself of the desire to transform the "facts" into fiction. To do so would require that he locate himself at a fixed point of stasis or pastoral harmony, in which his longing for the 'real' might be brought to a fulfilling end (death).

Like the 'real' which it yearns after, the interminable mode of desire that is Zuckerman's "narrative factory" (*The Counterlife*, 264) involves a composite of corporeal, material experience and imaginary chimera. In one sense, his particular form of narrative desire is consigned to the "unreal" mode of the fictional imagination, in which life is never experienced "*in the raw*." Conversely, Zuckerman remains tied to the bodily site of desire by his persistent, yet unfulfilled, longing to capture and subjugate the 'real' within fiction. His writing thus returns him to the locus of the embodied and biographical self from which he had originally sought escape through art. As a result of this contradictory situation, literature has left Zuckerman both agonisingly divorced from and yet, in equal measure, frustratingly attached to notions of the self and reality; an impersonation of life in which the distance between fact and fiction is simultaneously both widened and collapsed. Unable to resolve these self-divisions by finding "an active connection to life" outside of literature, Zuckerman anguishes over the fact that he is "[c]hained to my dwarf drama till I die" (*The Anatomy Lesson*, 399). Described as being unable "to escape the corpus that was his" (505) at the end of *The Anatomy Lesson*, Zuckerman remains hopelessly tied to this conflict between wanting a life "[w]*ith real teeth in it*" (504) and his own eviscerated body of writing. Unlike Lonoff, who appeared to live and write in separation from corporeal and worldly distractions, Zuckerman's personal desires and torments are thus firmly at odds with his efforts to find some

immutable literary understanding of life beyond the narrow confines of the embodied and historically rooted self.

Exile from and Return to the 'Real' World in the American Trilogy

In a paean to Lonoff, Zuckerman dedicates himself to an ascetic life of self-discipline in the American trilogy and *Exit Ghost* by living in exile from the greater world that exists beyond the pages of literature. Through this "experiment in radical seclusion" (*The Human Stain*, 44), he seeks to remove himself from the torturous contradictions that have marked the relationship between erotic desire and thanatological frustration in his life and work, as made painfully evident in *The Anatomy Lesson*. In *I Married a Communist*, he explains how his isolated retreat in the Berkshire Mountains operates as the lofty site from which he has transcended, a la Lonoff, "the agitation of the autobiographical" (72). Leaving behind the various entanglements that have characterised his combative engagement with the 'real' world beyond his writing, Zuckerman has retreated to what he calls:

> The place where you are stripped back to essentials … to decontaminate and dissolve yourself of the striving. The place where you disrobe, molt it all, the uniforms you've worn and the costumes you've gotten into, where you shed your batteredness and your resentment, your appeasement of the world and your defiance of the world, your manipulation of the world and its manhandling of you (72)

Having been made impotent by prostate surgery, Zuckerman thus withdraws from the tumult of desire and the manic improvisations of the self that shaped his ordeals in previous novels. As my chapters will illustrate, this involves a certain abandonment of the self as a bodily and desiring being in the later Zuckerman texts. By paying attention to the biographies of others in the novels of the American trilogy, Zuckerman attempts to commit an act of self-erasure whereby he seems to disappear as a character from the body of the text. In thus extricating himself from the narrative, he seeks to move beyond the anguishes of his "dwarf drama" and focus upon the wider historical events that have shaped the lives of his protagonists in these novels.

However, Zuckerman never fully vanishes as a subject in the American trilogy. Instead, his own particular experiences of trauma and longing are merely relocated within or displaced through the histories of his leading characters in these novels. By focusing upon particular ethnic or racial subjects whose lives are victim to various moments of trauma in the liberal narrative of post-war American history, Zuckerman finds a means of exploring how his own personal struggles partake of the wider national experience. This relationship between Zuckerman as a narrator who is apparently removed from events in the text and his various protagonists in the American trilogy can be understood in terms of the role of trauma witness. According to Dori Laub, the incomprehensible experience of trauma can only begin to be made sensible to the victim through the acknowledgment or corroborative testimony of a witness: "[t]he testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (57). As she makes clear, this role of witness is never passive, but one in which the onlooker or auditor is made to share in the horror of the event being witnessed: "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event … he comes to partially experience trauma in himself" (57). Cathy Caruth expounds further upon this notion of an active relationship between victim and witness. She suggests that in bearing testimony to another's experience of inexpressible pain, the witness can find a means of confronting the horrific moments of unacknowledged or unassimilated trauma which have plagued his or her own life: "one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another … trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (1996, 8). In this way, both victim and witness come to perceive a mutual sense of overwhelming torment, which before this moment of shared recognition had appeared entirely incommunicable to both the self and others. In the novels of the American trilogy, Zuckerman assumes the position of onlooker or witness to the wounded lives of the Swede, Ira and Murray Ringold, and Coleman Silk. Through this role, he finds a narrative means of rehearsing the various personal conflicts and traumas that he has sought to abandon in later life. In this way, Zuckerman is both hidden and exposed in these texts. On one hand, he acts as a disinterested literary

aesthete in the mould of Lonoff, impotent and removed from the narrative desire to engage with matters of the self and 'real' life as they exist outside of literature and writing. On the other hand, he provides a decidedly corporeal presence in these works as the author who is stimulated by a narrative urge to understand the as yet still unregistered experiences of trauma that he shares with others.

Interestingly, Zuckerman's determination to conceal his own story within the traumatic lives of other characters in the American trilogy marks a similar form of the "exhibitionism in hiding" (*The Counterlife*, 210) that had earlier been attributed to his writing. This sense of how the authorial self is exhibited through the fiction writer's impersonation of others can be understood in relation to notions of dialogism, as put forth in the arguments of Volosinov and Bakhtin. As a Marxist linguistic theory, dialogism argues that signs are always "constructed between socially organised persons in the process of their interaction" (Volosinov, 21). Language is thus never innocently neutral or self-integrated, but is instead shaped by an "*inner dialectical quality*" (23). All forms of utterance are, therefore, inflected by the hidden presence of other alien and antagonising voices: "the speaker's intentions … [are] populated – overpopulated – with the [contrary] intentions of others" (Bakhtin, 294). Leaving aside their Marxist analysis of social relations for one moment, Bakhtin and Volosinov have both provided an interesting reading of how the dialogic interaction between competing speakers and viewpoints finds adequate dramatisation within the many novelistic uses of indirect discourse. According to both theorists, indirect discourse allows the dominant narrative or authorial voice in the novel to be made vulnerable to the challenges of other opposing speakers. In the earlier novels that I have discussed, Zuckerman employs certain forms of impersonated or indirect speech that work dialogically in both confirming and undermining his authorial dominance over 'real' lives and events. Through various acts of ventriloquism, he internalises within his own narrative speech the many voices of protest and rebuke that have railed against his efforts to transform the "facts" into fiction. Yet ironically, such dramatisation of the dialogical tensions between him and others over the relationship of fiction to reality involves yet a further narrative re-

inscription of 'real' people by Zuckerman. In this circular fashion, his writing is both given license and subject to restraint by the dialogically opposing voices that he assimilates into his fiction.

In *The Counterlife*, Zuckerman elaborates upon how his role as a ventriloquist of other voices and positions defines the versatile range and expansive reach of his imagination: "I have … a variety of impersonations I can do, and not only of myself – a troupe of players that I have internalized, a permanent company of actors that I can call upon when a self is required, an evolving stock of pieces and parts that forms my repertoire" (321). This cacophonous display of imitated voices appears somewhat muted by his determination in the American trilogy to "disrobe" from the many "costumes" that he has worn. However, Zuckerman's desire to inhabit and explore other lives through fictional acts of impersonation has not been fully outlived in these works. Somewhat paradoxically, by submerging his biographical story within the lives of his protagonists in the American trilogy, Zuckerman continues to carry out a form of narrative disguise in which his earlier preoccupations with the harried conflicts of the self continue to be made evident. In the process of apparently muting the tendency toward narrative self-obsession that he demonstrated in *The Counterlife* and blending his voice with those of others, Zuckerman affects a style of indirect speech that Bakhtin and Volosinov called "quasi-direct discourse." In quasi-direct speech, two distinct and often antagonistic voices – usually narrator and protagonist – appear as conflated within a singular narrative perspective. This is a feigned act of synthesis, through which two separate viewpoints would seem to have been harmonised and shorn of any dialogical tension. Yet what appears on a cosmetic level as a self-integrated narrative voice is made subject to disruption and fracture by the double register of its two distinct speakers, each of which interrogates the other's position as author or narrator. Therefore, in quasi-direct discourse "[w]e perceive the author's accents and intonations being interrupted by these value judgments of another person" (Volosinov, 155). In my reading of the American trilogy, I will look at how Zuckerman's own voice – apparently no longer preoccupied by the problems of the self – identifies with and comes to resemble the perspective of

each particular protagonist about whom he is writing. However, this quasi-direct mode of self-effacement involves a contradictory form of engrossed self-exploration, whereby Zuckerman uses the lives of his subjects in these works as means of performing narrative variations on his own unfinished sense of biographical trauma. Whereas he claims to have silenced his particular brand of "narrative mania" (*The Counterlife*, 309) in these novels, Zuckerman in fact continues to invent lives and disguises with which he can place his own existence in dialogical tension.

The "dwarf drama" and the Great Stage of 'History'

Throughout this introduction, I have been trying to establish a sense in which the difficult relationship between the fictive and the 'real' in Roth's work is situated by particular historical experiences in some of his later novels. It is important to note, however, the manner in which the literary author's efforts to reinvent the self and reality in Roth's earlier fiction has often existed in tension with the limiting "facts" outlined by certain positivist or ideological notions of 'History.' In *The Counterlife*, for example, Henry accuses his brother of a "narcissistic" (104) literary obsession with "non-historical personal problems" (104-5). Such narrow self-interest appears to Henry as the "unspeakably puny" (105) concerns of Zuckerman's "inner landscape" as a writer, which compares poorly to his own muscular concept of "an *outer landscape*, a nation, a world!" (140). Yet despite Zuckerman's clear assertion that "[i]f you get out of yourself you can't be a writer" (*The Anatomy Lesson*, 399), he is also troubled by the way in which he has failed to relate the "inner landscape" of his literary imagination to broader experiences of cultural life. Zuckerman's desperate struggle in *The Anatomy Lesson* emphasises certain aspects of what Roth might call the contemporary American writer's tendency toward "literary onanism." Although he explains in this novel how "the personal ingredient is what gets you going" (399) as an author, Zuckerman has become hopelessly divorced from any larger concept of life "*in the raw*" beyond his introverted world of the self, writing, desire and pain. Hopelessly imprisoned within both his own afflicted body and that of his equally suffering fiction, he is led to conclude that: "if you

hang on to the personal ingredient any longer you'll disappear right up your asshole" (399). In an effort to escape this imprisoning realm of the self and/as fiction, Zuckerman seeks to access some knowledge of "the world of massive historical pain" through his sexual encounter with Jaga, an émigré from Communist Poland. However, he is ultimately unable to trade his own "dwarf drama" for a grander sense of "writing at the very heart of the upheaval" of Jaga's history: "Dante got out of hell easier than you'll escape Zuckerman-Carnovsky" (399). In *The Prague Orgy*, Zuckerman continues to seek a release "from the narrative encasing me … the ever-recurring story that's at once your invention and the invention of you" (568-9) by placing himself within Soviet occupied Czechoslovakia, where everyday cultural life would appear to have far greater historical resonance than in America. Yet despite the apparent "cultural eminence" (569) of his mission to rescue the confiscated short stories of a Holocaust survivor and bring them back for publication to America, his experiences in Prague are merely witness to the frustrating ways in which yet "[a]nother assault upon a world of significance degenerat[es] into a personal fiasco" (568). As a result of this comical "fiasco," Zuckerman is forced to finally realise that he cannot find a means of transcending the complex meshing of self, body, text and desire which has characterised his struggles as both a man and writer: "one's story isn't a skin to be shed – it's inescapable, one's body and blood" (568).

This thesis claims that the difficulty with grand narratives of 'History' in Roth is itself the product of a peculiar historical experience of the 'real' in post-war America. As Zuckerman tells Henry, in an effort to get his brother to return to his family in America and leave behind the militant Zionist fantasies that he is enacting in Israel: "[h]istory doesn't have to be made the way a mechanic makes a car – one can play a role in history without its having to be obvious, even to oneself" (*The Counterlife*, 146). Roth's fiction, both before and throughout his 'historical' novels, adopts this approach to contemporary American history as something that takes place on the complex level of private existence, rather than finding abstraction in broad-sweeping narrative terms. In "Writing and the Powers that Be," Roth suggests how this sense of an "outer" public realm that is

experienced in terms of a highly personal and imaginative "inner landscape" functions for him. This essay discusses perhaps his most explicit literary engagement with matters of national politics and history in the satire on Nixon, *Our Gang*. Despite its somewhat pointed political theme, however, Roth insists that he was concerned in this novel with distinctly literary "problems of representation, rather than bringing about [a] change [in] or 'making a statement'" (*Reading Myself and Others*, 12) on American public life. As this essay makes clear, Roth is interested in how the very much 'real' phenomena of national political life and Jewish cultural identity that intersect with his work are experienced by him in terms of a challenge to the internal workings of the literary imagination: "whatever serious acts of rebelliousness I may have engaged in as a novelist have been directed far more at my own imagination's system of constraints and habits of expression than at the powers that vie for control in the world" (12). This thesis argues that the blurring of the boundaries between "reality" and fiction in Roth's work involves a certain inter-penetration of the author's private imagination with the "outer landscape" of larger social and historical phenomena in post-war American life. The selection of later novels that I am discussing contribute to questions about the relationship between Roth and history by providing a greater sense of the 'real'/'unreal' exterior world of American history that has been, heretofore, largely dealt with in his work as an internal "system of constraints" upon the literary author's imagination.

The Critical Heritage

The main monographic surveys written prior to the publication of *American Pastoral* do acknowledge and discuss how the boundary between the inner-imaginary world of the author and the public scene in which he writes is constantly blurred and transgressed in Roth's fiction. Bernard Rodgers has mentioned that while Roth's fictional development was shaped by a concern "with exploring the self, he would also try to portray the effect of the fantastic nature of contemporary reality on that self's private life" (18). Yet although he acknowledges the sense of an "incredible and disordered public" (153) realm in which Roth's "representative Americans" (9) act,

Rodgers is more interested in how the difficult "private experience[s]" of these characters test and re-define the bounds of literary realism than in any broader treatment of what has shaped their contemporary environment. Elsewhere, Hermione Lee contends that Roth's fiction is "conscientiously caught between 'out there' … and 'in here'" (49) in its efforts to relate the private world of the authorial imagination to the strange experience of American public life after World War Two. However, like Rodgers before her, Lee's quite useful insight into how the overlapping connection between these separate spheres of the imaginary and the 'real' have shaped Roth's literature offers no real significant insight into what actual events or forces may be characterising the "bizarre and alien" sense of America as "Kafkaesque" (49) in his work. Baumgarten and Gottfried lay claim to a greater sense of how "the traumatic events of Western culture since World War Two press insistently upon Roth's characters" (9). Yet although these commentators refer in passing to the Depression, the Holocaust, McCarthyism and the Vietnam War as significant features in the lives of Roth's characters, their discussions on the ("traumatic") impact of such important historical episodes on the literary texts are scarce and negligible.

By contrast to those cited above, a certain historical line of criticism is indeed provided by Steven Milowitz. His general argument suggests that Roth's fiction "employs a style that inverts the conditions of the Holocaust world" (52). Milowitz describes certain irresolvable contradictions between epistemological uncertainty and inventive possibility in Roth's fiction in terms of a "humanism of ambiguity … a bulwark against the antihumanism of ideology" (51). Significantly, Milowitz suggests that the experience of American reality in Roth's fiction, where "[t]he world feels so estranged" for his characters, acts as "an echo, a remainder, a result, and a reminder of the Holocaust" (163). In this way, he claims that the countervailing forces of traumatic dread (Thanatos) and creative possibility (Eros) which mark the ambiguous and uncertain experience of the 'real' in Roth's writing result not so much from any singularly American context, but from a submerged knowledge of the Holocaust. For Stephen Wade, much like the others that I have thus far mentioned, Roth's writing

explores “the rift between man and the materiality, the thingness of his environment … seeking to locate a sense of identity in that angst” (21). Wade is particularly interested in how this sense of alienation from the ‘real’ in Roth has been developed by a “relation to the dual traditions of didactic realism and experimental modernism” (15). However, his view of Roth’s fiction as “a place of inner dialogues with a wider, incomprehensible world and with inner confusion and uncertainty” (21) places greater stress upon the “interior alienness of the narrator” (22) as a particularly modernist and postmodernist literary phenomenon than upon any “didactic” realist sense of an exterior world outside of the “inward-looking, ego identity” (21).

The publication of the American trilogy has done little to improve this reluctance among literary scholars toward providing a more detailed historical reading of Roth. Insisting that “[t]he Roth canvas is vertical, in portrait mode, not horizontal, in [historical] landscape” (2007, 146), Mark Shechner has argued that the post-war history upon which the American trilogy draws is “merely backstory” (143) or a “prop” (145). Ross Posnock cites the attacks upon agitprop literature in *I Married a Communist* and identity politics in *The Human Stain* as evidence that Roth’s ongoing assault against the “antihumanism” (2006, 50) of those who would carry out a “redirection of scholarship from author to context” (51) is upheld in his later work. David Brauner argues that Roth’s American trilogy establishes an “ideological conflict between pastoral Utopianism … and anti-pastoral humanism” (2007, 157). Yet in his determination to outline Roth’s defiance towards the more utopian political credos of certain characters in these novels, Brauner fails to examine any way in which the author’s “anti-pastoral humanism” might itself be situated by particular historical coordinates or experiences. In this sense, he would appear to see Roth’s engagement with recent American history in such texts as being primarily interested in placing a certain concept of “humanism” at odds with narrow historical or ideological definitions of subjectivity.

Debra Shostak takes a somewhat different approach. She reads the American trilogy as a new shift away from the “will to self-invention” evident in earlier

Zuckerman novels and "toward an unprecedentedly deterministic conception of history as the context for American subjectivity" (234). In ways that resonate with my own argument, she outlines how these novels are set within a postlapsarian American environment, where a sense of what is 'real' or determining events and lives remains elusive to both Roth's protagonists and his narrator, Zuckerman. According to Shostak, related acts of narrative authorship and self-reinvention in these novels undergo a difficult struggle between willed individual intention/desire and a determining or counter-manipulating experience of "the chaos that is American history" (266). Yet whereas she provides a keen insight into the narrative dynamics and aesthetic implications of this struggle between "determinism" and "autonomy" (230), Shostak's assessment of the particular post-war context through which this postlapsarian narrative is dramatised in Roth's fiction is markedly barren. In her useful attempt to illustrate how a paradigmatic view of 'fallen' history is related to and makes problematic acts of narration and self-authorship in the American trilogy, Shostak tends to glide over specific issues of the recent American past that are dealt with by Roth. Elaine Safer would also appear to embrace the notion of a 'historical turn' within Roth's more recent fiction by comparing "earlier works, which were focused on characters' private concerns," with later novels that "more clearly develop a social context" (2006, 3). However, she argues that the historical episodes which Roth treats in these later works are not subject to a serious consideration of the American past, but rather serve as suitable backdrops for the author's overriding stylistic concern with "mingling … tragic and comic" (70) effects. Elsewhere, Derek Parker Royal claims that the American trilogy sees Roth leaving behind the "solipsistic exercises in bellybutton gazing" (2005, 187) of *The Anatomy Lesson* and *The Counterlife* by "writ[ing] the individual subject into the fabric of history" (186). Yet despite his claim that each of these novels "illustrates that identity is not only a product of, but also hostage to, the many social, political, and cultural forces that surround it" (186), Royal provides little more assessment of such historical issues than pointing out how *I Married a Communist* and *American Pastoral* signal "the ambiguity underlying the American project." (202).

In marked contrast to other critics, Anthony Hutchinson has provided a detailed historicist analysis of the American trilogy. Most tellingly, his argument that Roth's triumvirate of novels explore the "'betrayal' … of a specific midcentury expression of American liberalism" (167) finds striking correspondence with my own interest in the political context of these works. Hutchinson describes this betrayed idea of liberal politics and culture as a "'paleoliberalism' … that was both anti-McCarthy *and* unambiguously anticommunist" (167). According to him, Roth's trilogy explores how this heroic intellectual and political ideal of modern liberalism, with its "unapologetic commitment to the *idea* of America," has been: "squeezed to the margins of American life by the end of the century as a result of the rise of neoconservatism and the cultural left" (167). While my own thesis does follow a similar line of enquiry, there are highly important divergences between both of our arguments. In particular, I would question Hutchinson's contention that "a political position can be consistently traced in these late novels of Philip Roth" (167). He suggests that Roth is unequivocally loyal to the "'majoritarian' liberalism of the midcentury 'proud decades' of American life," where the "emphasis" was upon "the relationship of the individual to the republic or broader national collective rather than any ethnic subgroup" (167). As I have been suggesting, this corrosion of the greater liberal-national ideal in the second half of the twentieth century is indeed registered in terms of a catastrophic trauma in Roth's fiction. However, my thesis will explore how such "paleoliberalism" is presented by Roth as containing internally the very germ or repressed trauma that helps to bring about its own decline. I will argue that this heightened notion of American liberalism commits certain acts of self-betrayal in Roth's novels, as well as suffering at the hands of its detractors on the Left and Right. My localised readings of the texts within the American trilogy will explore further the differences between my own argument and that of Hutchinson. I wish to draw attention to how the latter sees these novels as loyal to or supportive of a notion of 'paleo-liberal' origins, which he locates in the voice of certain authoritative 'paternal' figures within both *I Married a Communist* and *American Pastoral*. My own argument will insist that such issues of paternity and origin find a greater degree of sundering and ambivalence in Roth's work than is allowed by Hutchinson. Furthermore, this problem

of origins and fatherhood is linked inextricably to questions of literary authorship for Roth. Such a key issue in his writing is negligibly sidelined by Hutchinson, who fails to adequately treat the relationship of Zuckerman, as the self-exiled artist, to the broader themes of liberal politics within the American trilogy.

Chapter Outline

As I have already intimated, the main body of this thesis will consist of three rather lengthy chapters that deal with each novel in the American trilogy. Instead of treating these texts in order of their publication dates, my chapters will reflect the chronological sequence of events in post-war American life that are covered by Roth's trilogy. In the first chapter, I will discuss how *I Married a Communist* deals with significant shifts and modulations in liberal political and cultural thought during the immediate aftermath of World War Two. Taking place against a backdrop of McCarthyism, this novel concentrates its attention on how post-war liberalism began to move away from some of the leftist influences of the Popular Front alliance that thrived during the 1930s and toward a greater political acceptance of existing socio-economic conditions in America. This renegotiation of the liberal agenda involved a precarious balance between opposing hard-line leftist elements that were considered sympathetic toward Soviet totalitarianism, while at the same time upholding a progressive ethos that was equally set against the politics of the virulently anti-Communist American Right. By inserting itself into this historical context, Roth's novel explores some important inconsistencies and contradictions within the newly defined form of liberal progressivism that emerged after the war. Most importantly, I will examine how *I Married a Communist* challenges the particular form of literary historicism that was used to support the reconstructed liberal arguments of scholars such as Lionel Trilling and Philip Rahv.

My second chapter will look at how *American Pastoral* deals with the various crises within post-war liberalism that emerged during the 1960s. Through the family

tragedy of his protagonist, Seymour "the Swede" Levov, Roth re-traces the manner in which the prevailing centrist or "consensus" ideal of liberalism that shaped American life after World War Two became torn asunder by newly emerging forms of leftist radicalism and right-wing conservatism during the sixties. The relationship between history and trauma in Roth's work is particularly pronounced in *American Pastoral*, signalling the huge impact of the sixties in shattering the Rooseveltian spirit of collective progress that had developed during the New Deal and which continued to guide the reconstructed, anti-Stalinist liberalism of the post-war years. Through the pseudo-authorial presence of Zuckerman in this novel, Roth explores the relationship between the traumatised national experience of the sixties and the various conflicts that have, paradoxically, both impeded and given impetus to his efforts to engage himself as a literary artist with American public life.

The break-up of American progressive notions of national unity that was precipitated by events in the sixties finds further attention in *The Human Stain*, which provides the focus for my third chapter. I will examine how the fortunes of Roth's protagonist in this novel, Coleman Silk, become entangled in a cruelly ironic conflict between an older social phenomenon of racial passing and contemporary modes of identity politics. An African-American subject who had decided at an early age to secretly passing as white in order to escape the inequalities of race in mid-century America, Coleman is later accused of being a racially prejudiced white male within the heightened atmosphere of political correctness that prevailed at the end of the twentieth century. Juxtaposing passing and identity politics thus as two historically divided ways of viewing race, Roth examines how universalising liberal concepts of cultural commonality and collective progress have been eroded by certain post-sixties' ideas about America as a society that is sharply divided along lines of race, gender and sexuality. Through his narration of Coleman's story, Zuckerman re-traces the ongoing conflicts in his own life between the ethnically defined concept of subjectivity attached to his experience as a Jewish-American and his aspiration to re-define himself as a writer within a broader and more deracinated notion of cultural tradition. In my reading

of *The Human Stain*, I will examine how the conflict between Zuckerman's lifelong efforts to emulate Lonoff's impersonal mode of literary style and his inescapable sense of ethnic belonging contributes to the fierce debates over cultural canonicity that arose from the emergence of identity politics.

In my final and concluding chapter, I will examine how *The Plot against America* and *Exit Ghost* treat of certain moments of symbolic 'beginnings' and 'endings' within modern American liberalism; episodes which somewhat book-end the historical periods that are treated in the novels of the American trilogy. *The Plot against America* provides an interesting look back at the exalted origins of the modern liberal dream of nationhood that is subject to so much pressure and conflict from events in the American trilogy. This novel provides a counterfactual history in which Roosevelt is defeated in the 1940 Presidential Election by the isolationist and Nazi sympathiser Charles Lindbergh. Roth examines the consequences faced by his fictionalised Jewish family in the text, once the social and cultural benefits of their New Deal sense of belonging to America is placed under threat by this "unforeseen" change in national history. What my discussion will indicate is how Roth returns to and reinvents the "facts" of the Roosevelt era in order to highlight the precarious foundations of its triumphal notions of social progress and cultural unity. In addition, I wish to show how the trauma of events that see a tearing apart of the secure and peaceful world of family and home for Roth's child narrator, "Philip Roth," is directly linked to the early development of the literary artist in *The Plot against America*. In *Exit Ghost*, Zuckerman is openly reacquainted with the conflicted experiences of the self that he had partially managed to mute or contain in the American trilogy. By emerging out of isolation and re-entering into the fray of social life in New York, he is once more subject to the various aspects of desire and anguish that had been bred by his prior engagements with American "reality." What *Exit Ghost* suitably demonstrates, I will argue, is the manner in which Zuckerman's tortured conflict with a national scene that seems out of joint and difficult to comprehend remains undiminished, despite the many years in which he has tried to find refuge from such an agonising sense of trauma. While this final instalment in the Zuckerman series

returns us somewhat to the “dwarf drama” that was obfuscated by matters of greater national and historical significance in the American trilogy, Roth uses the backdrop of the Bush/Kerry election of 2004 to remind us how the personal ordeals of the authorial self in his fiction are related to the increasingly disillusioning decline of the progressive idealism that had so animated the nation at mid-century.

"Redface": Exploring Issues of Liberal Politics and Literary Style in *I Married a Communist*

This chapter will explore how *I Married a Communist* dramatises the impact upon American intellectual culture, particularly literary criticism, of certain upheavals within liberal political thought immediately following World War Two. In outlining this argument, I will first of all examine how the dominant school of liberal theorists and literary scholars in this period, known historically as the 'New York Intellectuals,'[3] undertook a paradigmatic shift away from certain left-leaning approaches to politics and culture that had found strong currency within American liberalism during the more radicalised era of the Depression. As Anthony Hutchinson has explained, the encouragement by the Soviet Union of a global 'Popular Front' alliance against fascism between the Communist Party and its 'fellow travelling' sympathisers found a particularly strong appeal within American liberalism amid the socio-economic travails of the Depression. He describes how members of this loose coalition found a common form of identification with "the widely deployed term 'progressive'" (67) during the 1930s.[4] Yet by the end of World War Two, revelations in America of the catastrophic effects of European totalitarianism led those among the New York group of liberals who had previously advanced the influence of leftist ideas upon intellectual and literary culture to undertake a serious reconsideration of their arguments. In particular, the New York critics began to reassess the entire philosophical and moral bases for their recent support of leftist concepts, amid fears that their own ideas of historical progress had in

[3] This collective name has been used by commentators such as Jumonville, Wilford and Wald to describe a diverse group of liberal thinkers that were based in New York in the early Cold War period. Although different and often opposing in their ideas, members of this milieu are usually defined by their shared concern with how American intellectual and cultural life might be utilised in the service of liberal political values. The grouping largely consisted of a close circle of critics and friends who worked alongside each other in establishing, editing and contributing to such journals as *Partisan Review* and *Commentary*.

[4] Hutchinson explains how the Popular Front alliance in America during the 1930s achieved a particular level of appeal and success as a result of The New Deal, which, he explains: "undoubtedly helped foster a climate within which the complex attachment of a large section of the 1930s left-liberal intellectual community to Stalin's Soviet Union was made possible" (65). He stresses that the Popular Front idea took hold not only as a result of a "drift to the left among centrists," but as a result of the US Communist Party's "move to the center under the new Comintern policy" (68) which had sought out a form of rapprochement with fellow travelling supporters of the Soviet cause in common action against the rise of fascism worldwide.

some ways leant support to Stalinism. Horrified by the human costs of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, many different intellectual voices within American liberalism began to respond to what they saw as an urgent need to "refine our motives and ask what might lie behind our good impulses" (Trilling, 220).

Roth's novel inserts itself into this particular historical context by charting the sudden decline in post-war America of a radical form of left-liberal progressivism, whose widening popular appeal during the Depression had reached a climax with American military victory in World War Two. As the novel's ostensible protagonist, Ira Ringold serves as chief ideologue for Popular Front notions of socialism as the dream of the American "common man" in *I Married a Communist*. Ira is the voice and public persona of the radio programme *The Free and the Brave*, a show dedicated to valorising leftist ideas of social and economic equality by presenting them as harmonious with historically resonant concepts of American freedom and democracy. By appropriating various heroic figures and symbols that constitute his popular knowledge of American history, and re-inscribing them within a broader leftist framework, Ira projects a self-image as monumental defender of the oppressed. However, despite such an attempt at self-inscription into the mythic lore of the American past, Ira does not get to tell his own story in *I Married a Communist*. It is through his older brother, Murray Ringold, and his former protégé in political activism, Nathan Zuckerman, that Ira's biography is reconstructed. The narrative unfolds many years after the death of the pseudonymous "Iron Man" (35), when Zuckerman reunites with Murray, his former high-school English teacher and the person through whom he first befriended Ira. A chance encounter while the 90 year old Murray is attending a course on Shakespeare at a nearby college to Zuckerman's isolated home in the Berkshire Mountains results in a lengthy, six night transmission of the missing parts of his brother's story to his former pupil and now celebrated writer, who, in turn, supplements the narrative with memories of his adolescent friendship with Ira.

Both of these voices provide a critical mediation of the aggrandised self-image that Ira projected as a popular radio star and propagandist for the Communist Party. By standing in judgment of Ira's highly emotional and purblind attachment to notions of political utopia, Roth's two narrators appear to share in key post-war liberal criticisms of the greatly popularised culture and politics of the Left during the New Deal and World War Two. However, Ira's tragic story as a disgraced Communist party member during the era of McCarthyism should be seen as one that intimately involves the complicated personal lives and progressive political hopes of both Murray and Zuckerman. It is possible to read in their narrative reconstructions of Ira's biography a sense of how each man has struggled separately to understand and come to terms with his own experience of post-war American history, not least because of how McCarthyism turned its attention toward both of them. Although Murray and Zuckerman clearly illustrate the ideological naiveté of Ira's continued commitment to Popular Front politics following the war, they each pay witness to the despondency involved in their own sense of displacement from a progressive vision of America in this period. Both are presented in the novel as attempting to make sense of a world in which the viability of the progressive models of moral, intellectual and cultural understanding that they were once committed to are cast into serious doubt. By looking at the separate ways in which both narrators have had to modulate their political relationship to American social and cultural life, I will examine how some of the tensions within the reconstructed version of liberalism that emerged after World War Two are explored in Roth's novel. Significantly, I will discuss how *I Married a Communist*, as a literary text, explores certain contradictions and limitations involved in post-war liberal arguments about the political function of American literature.

Refining Motives: Anti-Stalinist Liberal Thought in Post-war America

Across their varying arguments, the wide and diverse group known as the New York Intellectuals undertook a highly self-conscious and scrupulous reassessment of the theoretical and moral foundations of liberal politics in the early post-war years.

Determined to distance themselves from authoritarian leftist notions of progress, these thinkers began to reject what they saw as intransigent forms of political ideology. For the New York Intellectuals, ideology became a sort of watch-word for totalitarianism; a mechanical form of thought that reduces the complexities of the human experience to a flattened cipher, expendable to the exigencies of an uncompromising vision of social perfection.[5] In contrast to the rigid principles of historical progress through which Soviet totalitarianism found its justification, liberal intellectuals after the war began to articulate certain non-linear and ahistorical notions about the fundamentally complex and imperfect condition of human life. By holding to a more humanist-centred and anti-teleological viewpoint that emphasised the resistance of mankind's "eternal dilemmas" (Pells, 1985 125) to the aggressive theory of historical development put forth by Stalinism, the New York Intellectuals began to develop various positions of moral ambiguity toward their own hitherto commitments to progressive notions of social change. In doing so, they were calling into question the very theoretical assumptions about how "the future might redeem the present" (Cooney, 1986 220) that had underpinned the alliance of leftists and liberals during the Depression era.

Reinhold Niebuhr's thesis on the ironic discrepancies between well-intended principles of progressive reform and mankind's inherent proclivity to betray or corrupt such ideals was to have a distinct influence upon these efforts to modulate the bases of liberal belief in the post-war era. Seeing in strictly positivist ideas of social progress a dangerous Rousseauist faith in mankind's fundamental innocence and perfectibility, Niebuhr put forth an anti-teleological idea of human corruptibility that drew upon a concept of 'Original Sin.' In *The Irony of American History*, he notes how an unchecked belief in the progressive potential of American democracy has, at different stages of the past, paved the way for a perverse tendency toward violence and despotism. In locating what he sees as this tragic sense of historical irony, Niebuhr argues that "Modern man's confidence in his virtue [has] caused an equally unequivocal rejection of the Christian

[5] As Neil Jumonville explains, post-war liberals did not hold to "the Marxist definition of ideology as false consciousness," but saw it as "utopian rather than practical, passionately committed to an ideal rather than rationally analytical" (109).

idea of the ambiguity of human virtue" (3). By being thus aware of "the inherent limitation in the ability of men and women to control history" (Schaub, 10), Niebuhr envisaged a more self-conscious and cautious liberal approach to reforming the social and moral relations that exist between people. His postlapsarian idea of innate human failing calls for a more mature liberalism that is shorn of its past naiveties, and which would carry "responsibilities which involve unavoidable guilt" (Niebuhr, 36).

A leading light among the New York Intellectuals, Lionel Trilling discusses a similarly "ironic and tragic" notion of human "corruption" (221) that makes problematic the good faith of American liberals in ideas of political and social reform: "[s]ome paradox of our natures leads us, when once we have made our fellow men the objects of our enlightened interest, to go on to make them the objects of our pity, then of our wisdom, ultimately of our coercion" (221-2). In ways that resemble Niebuhr's argument, Trilling's notion of "moral realism" – what he calls "the perception of the dangers of the moral life itself" (219) – makes ambiguous the potential for an outright progressive transformation of society. Some commentators are keen to point out how rational ideas about improving American society continued to form the basis of the reconstructed liberal philosophy of Trilling and others after World War Two, despite the manner in which Niebuhr's quasi-religious argument about innate human corruption challenged the secular Enlightenment belief in mankind's ability to rationally shape historical conditions.[6] Yet due to the great spectre of totalitarian ideology that loomed over their ideas and writings, a distinctly moral and humanistic impulse to qualify previously held notions of rational thought and political system pervaded the arguments of most of these liberal thinkers. Although hopes for a measure of historical progress through a reasoned understanding and redefinition of social relations continued to hold currency among

[6] For example, Terry Cooney outlines how more left-leaning liberals among the *Partisan Review* coterie opposed what they saw as "the contemporary flight from rationality and from the critical traditions built up over two hundred years," as evident in the "mystical or anti-scientific thought" (1986, 192) of Niebuhr. Cooney claims that, although not sharing in the efforts to uphold a leftist sensibility which were made by such people as Irving Howe and Sidney Hook in the post-war years, "Trilling came firmly down on the side of a more sensitive historical criticism" that argued "for a more inclusive and more balanced rational philosophy, not for the rejection of rationalism" (220).

liberals in the post-war age, the reaction to totalitarianism led many to heed a similar warning to that of Niebuhr against the moral limitations and violent irrationalism of the human spirit. In this way, ideas about improving social conditions among post-war liberals became tempered by an overriding awareness of man's intractably 'fallen' nature, leading them to adopt a "tragic outlook" which "suspected that we could not control the various aspects of our lives – through reform or good intentions" (Jumonville, 124-5).[7]

The dominant currents of liberal thought after the war came to insist upon a form of political praxis that – as Niebuhr's idea of guilt and Trilling's "moral realism" suggested – favoured notions of a pragmatic or 'realistic' compromise with existing socio-economic structures over the militant and utopian illusions fostered by ideology. For example, in *The End of Ideology*, Daniel Bell criticised the violence of the revolutionary "chiliast [who] is neither in the world nor of it" (281). In turn, he called for such naivety to be superseded by the sober judgment of the liberal pragmatist, who, being *of* the world, realises the necessity for a less than perfect form of compromise between political ideals and existing social conditions.[8] Similarly, in Arthur Schlesinger's *The Vital Center*, this idea of compromise was valorised for how it engendered a vibrantly contested middle-ground that is free from the political dangers of ideological extremes, and yet at the same time facilitates a cautiously modified and gradualist liberal approach to changing social and economic conditions. Rejecting an

[7] Jumonville provides an interesting insight into the correlations between the arguments of Niebuhr and Trilling by arguing that: "Niebuhr's *The Irony of American History* (1952) introduced the concepts of irony, tragedy, and complexity into historical analysis at the same time that Trilling announced the need for complexity and nuance in critical analysis" (125). He claims that Trilling's moral concepts of "complexity and ambiguity were allied to a tragic sense of life" that was "fundamentally conservative, for it acknowledged the extent to which society was unable to control itself" (124). Despite his claim that Trilling held steady to the values of rational thinking, Cooney asserts that his argument of "moral realism" brought into disarray any radical notion of historical progress: "If many others in moving away from Marxism had clung to an 'optimism of progress,' Trilling called into doubt even the sustaining hope that progress was possible" (1986, 220). As the main text of my argument will indicate below, Schaub provides the most broad sweeping condemnation of what he calls "the conservative critique from within liberalism" (11) supplied by the "moral ahistoricism" (12) of men like Trilling and Niebuhr.

[8] Quoting Lord Acton, Bell states that: "[c]ompromise is the 'soul if not the whole of politics … and progress is along diagonals'" (298).

older "liberalism [that] had long been almost inextricably identified with a picture of man as perfectible" (viii), Schlesinger argued that "[s]o long as society stays free … it will continue in a state of tension, breeding contradiction, breeding strife" (225). This "fundamental resistance to formula and closed system … [and] essential concern with openness and possibility" (Cooney, 1986 221) among liberal intellectuals found expression in the fluid and democratically contestable notion of consensus that dominated American social, political and economic values in the period after World War Two. I will deal at greater length with the idea of a post-war "liberal consensus" regarding the Keynesian structures of American democratic capitalism in the historical outline to my next chapter on *American Pastoral*. Suffice at this stage to indicate that, by recognising only the level of "contradiction" or "strife" that may be permitted within the broader compromises of America's "vital center," many among the New York Intellectuals maintained a certain aloofness from more divisive and ideologically toned issues of social and economic inequality.

Alan Wald has suggested that the "self-proclaimed repudiation of Marxism by many [liberal intellectuals] must be understood as … a rationalization for the continued dominance of bourgeois society to which they had become reconciled" (230). Like Wald, Schaub argues that the moral imperative for a "reform of the expectations of reform" (22) brought about a shift in the focus of American liberalism away from concerns with transforming material conditions and toward a scrupulous analysis of the human capacities and motivations for effecting such changes. He claims that the impact which people like Trilling and Niebuhr had on progressive liberal thinking "was to lift the possibilities for change out of the realm of material cause and situate them within the workings of a mystical human nature" (22). According to this argument, post-war liberals abandoned the materialist historicism of the Left by developing more transhistorical ideas about mankind's morally complex and tragically limited predicament.[9] This particular form of liberal humanism laid claim to a notion of

[9] Schaub's indictment of what he sees as post-war liberal conservatism finds some support in the arguments of Jumonville and Cooney. Of course, the separate voices among the New York Intellectuals

disinterested and objective reasoning that was held in contrast to the stifling purview of those committed to a systematically formulated and strictly materialist understanding of society. New York liberals after the war saw themselves as guardians of a detached intellectual approach to the universal dilemmas of 'Man' and 'Society,' which steered clear of the irrational emotiveness and violence that they attributed to revolutionary demands for an immediate overhaul of existing social conditions.[10] In this fashion, reason and sober intellectual judgment became valued in their own right as bastions against the emotional and violent atrophy of rational thought that took place within 'chiliastic' ideologies. Yet this determination to purify notions of rational argument and political reasoning of any contaminating sense of intellectual narrowness meant that these liberal thinkers became somewhat disengaged from the material and ideological conflicts that continued to take place within American society.[11]

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should not be conveniently subsumed under a simple rubric of de-radicalised liberalism. Schaub himself is careful to explain how he is tracing a "dominant trend" (23) among post-war liberals, to which he places men like Sidney Hook and John Dewey as an exception. Cooney and Jumonville both pay recognition to the differences between the left-leaning and more conservative writers among the New York Intellectuals. Yet in spite of such ostensible differences, both commentators have also mapped a broad convergence of political direction among these thinkers. Tracing the development of an anti-Stalinist position within *Partisan Review* in the late thirties, Cooney has discussed the problems for maintaining a Marxist line of argument among its editors, Philip Rahv and William Phillips, that would avoid the totalising effects of ideological dogma: "simplifications of Marxism into stiff doctrine moved the *Partisan Review* intellectuals to insist so emphatically on the fluid and open nature of a Marxist approach that the whole idea of radical system was threatened" (1986, 160). Neil Jumonville distinguishes between what he calls the dissenters and affirmers (in relation to the American cultural and political mainstream of the post-war liberal consensus) among the New York Intellectuals. However, his survey illustrates the ultimate failure of the dissenters' attempts to straddle the awkward ground between leftism and anti-ideological ideas: "the task for the left wing of the New York group was to carve out a respectable position somewhere between rejecting Communist ideological absolutism and accepting a conservative pragmatic world without any ideology whatever" (143).

[10] For example, Irving Howe has argued that the continuance of liberal political and cultural dissent in America relies upon the scrupulous discipline and vigour of the independent minded intellectual: "[t]he most glorious vision of the intellectual life is still that which is loosely called humanist: the idea of a mind committed yet dispassionate, ready to stand alone, curious, eager, sceptical" ("This Age of Conformity," 345). More so than most other post-war liberals, Howe attempted to hold faith with "the liberal-radical vision of the good society" ("This Age of Conformity, 335). However, his opposition to the Stalinist "religion of History" ("Authoritarians on the Left, 303) and other such "belief[s] in the 'unqualified goodness of man'" ("This age of Conformity," 335) led him to share with his contemporaries a position of detached and sophisticated intellectual reflection that went far in qualifying any previous reformist impulses he may have had for engaging with socio-material conflicts on a level of leftist political commitment.

[11] In support of this argument, Hugh Wilford has suggested that the "idea of the detached, autonomous dissident" which found strong appeal among the New York Intellectuals bred among them a sense of "practical ineffectuality" (244) in dealing with the alleviation of social and economic inequalities.

Post-war liberal critics were not only concerned with the corrupting influence of ideology in American political and intellectual life, but they saw in a growing mass culture a comparable tendency to reduce the complexities of the human experience to facile reproductions. The experience of European totalitarianism evidenced for this intellectual milieu how mass cultural spectacles and myths had facilitated fascist and Stalinist propaganda. Described by Neil Jumonville as a two front "struggle against kitsch and Khrushchev" (165), the arguments of people like Clement Greenberg and Dwight MacDonald came to champion notions of intellectual probity and high-cultural tradition as important bulwarks against the reductive and violent simplifications of mass ideologies.[12] Yet, in appealing to notions of intellectual scrutiny and sophisticated cultural expression as means of safeguarding American social life against any incipient slide toward totalitarianism, liberal thinkers in this period avowed a disinterested and elitist view of culture and thought that ran somewhat counter to their ostensible position as reformists who were engaged by the social and political needs of the masses.[13]

This highly valued idea of 'Culture' as something that is detached from ideology and superior to the whims of popular taste finds expression in the literary criticism of post-war liberal critics. Below, I will discuss how Lionel Trilling and Philip Rahv each borrowed from a particular literary branch of high-modernist aestheticism in order to

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Jumonville has also contributed to this discussion, remarking upon how the New York liberals "were more driven by their intellectual responsibilities to rationalism, tolerance, and freedom of enquiry than to their political dedication to the concepts of socialism, equality, social justice, and planning" (47).

[12] In "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," Greenberg argues that: "[t]he encouragement of kitsch is merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects. Since these regimes cannot raise the cultural level of the masses … they will flatter the masses by bringing all culture down to their level" (47). MacDonald shares with Greenberg an anxiety about how high cultural standards and traditions are being eroded by the incursions of what he calls both "Masscult" and "Midcult" into most aspects American public life. Like MacDonald, Greenberg appeals to notions of an avant-garde cultural "elite as a countermovement to both Masscult and Midcult" (70).

[13] Schaub states that: "The changed relationship of radical thought to the masses or the working class appears most conservatively in postwar liberalism as the need to preserve high culture from the degradations of mass culture" (17). Jumonville has argued that the New York Intellectuals' general view of the habits and pastimes of the masses as "a dangerous undermining of free intellectual culture" (185) failed to provide any materialist understanding of the relationship between popular culture and socio-economic experience.

develop a new model for the American novel that would effectively articulate the complex humanist perspective by which they opposed ideology and mass culture. This involved an idea of the verisimilar "function of the novel as social history" (Schaub, 25) in so much as it reflected the manifold layers of tensions and moral ambiguities that comprised the post-war liberal idea of an embattled or 'fallen' human condition.[14] In attempting to articulate their elaborate notions about social conditions and the human potential for transforming them, liberal scholars embraced certain notions of nuanced literary style as a way of wresting American literature from what they argued was the leftist dominance of naturalist political fiction. They found in naturalism a popular form that too easily loaned itself to the positivist ideas of what Trilling called an "American metaphysic, [in which] reality is always material reality, hard, resistant, unformed, impenetrable, and unpleasant" (13). As opposed to what they saw as the decidedly empirical and determinist understanding of historical experience expressed within the content of naturalist literature, these literary critics turned to more sophisticated ideas of literary form in order to articulate their anti-ideological views on the moral complexities of life.

By thus opposing leftist naturalism with an alternative political aesthetic that was based on notions of highly developed style, the literary critics among the New York Intellectuals found striking connections with the politically conservative modernist ideas expressed within the American school of New Criticism. This New Critic valorisation of aesthetic form is exemplified by Cleanth Brooks' argument that, in its deployment of "ambiguity," "paradox," and "irony" (*The Well Wrought Urn*, 1355), the literary artefact "will always show itself as deflected away from a positive, straightforward formulation" (1363). In contrast to the liberal political motivations of the New York school, the New

[14] Schaub states that: "Trilling, Rahv, and Howe insisted upon defining the novel as a picture of the social world because they themselves wished to sustain a relation that might modify that world" (Schaub, 30). Similarly, Terry Cooney asserts that: "the *Partisan Review* critics maintained as a central article of faith that however much attention was given to strictly artistic considerations, literature must also be examined within a social context" (1986, 157-8). According to Neil Jumonville, the New York Intellectuals' attitude to literature marked: "a holistic approach … that discouraged distinctions between literature and politics, or art and social policy" (9).

Critics ardently refuted any suggestion that extraneous matters of history or politics were relevant to the internal structure of the literary work. For them, any such critical attention to content was seen as positivist and motivated by biased sectional interests. Thus viewing the literary artifice as an object that exists at a disinterested remove from its social or authorial context, the various New Critical writers shared a sense of what John Crowe Ransom called: "the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own right" (1115).[15] Yet while the New Critics did speak against the idea of literature referring to anything in the 'prosaic' or 'non-literary' world of politics, history and authorial biography, they did claim for it a vision of "the unity of experience … [that] triumphs over the apparently contradictory and conflicting elements of experience by unifying them into a new pattern" (*The Well Wrought Urn*, 1365). This singularly aesthetic process is described elsewhere by Ransom as that where the "poet perpetuates in his poem an order of existence which in actual life is constantly crumbling beneath his touch" (1117). Mark Jancovitch has argued that this transcendent and immutable sense of an aesthetic order existing outside of quotidian life did in fact serve a particular political vision. According to Jancovitch, the aesthetic principles of the New Critics involved a politics of form that distinguished it from the obsessions with content shared among the naturalist school of left-leaning writers in America. He suggests that the literary arguments of New Critics evoked a Southern conservative ideal of order that stood opposed to the chaotic dislocations and materialist ideologies of industrialised modernity in the north of the country. Jancovitch explains that, according to the detached modernist perspectives of the Southern critics, "literature was a form of social criticism against bourgeois society" (20). In ways that find clear resonance with what I have been outlining as the theoretical foundations of the broadened liberal hostility to Stalinism after the war, Jancovitch goes on to explain how: "the Southern preoccupation with Original Sin … acknowledged the complex historical and material conditions of

[15] In "The Presenr Function of Criticism," to cite another example, Allen Tate makes a similar claim about "the special, unique, and complete knowledge which the great forms of literature affords us" (8).

human existence, and rejected abstract and ideal solutions which failed to take these conditions into account" (17).[16]

As I have mentioned, the New York liberal critics openly expressed a fundamental interest in the social and political role of the novel that ostensibly stood at odds with New Criticism. However, they also developed a formalist attitude similar to people like Brooks and Ransom in so much as they saw high-literary form as offering an "order of existence" that would act as a redemptive model of life against the ideological and cultural degradations of mass modernity. As a result of the "contradictions inherent in their dual commitment to aestheticism and engagement" (Wilford, 92), the New York Intellectuals placed certain limitations upon the role that progressive ideas about material social conditions could continue to perform within the American novel. This considered interest in the modulating effects of novelistic form upon the more positivist aspects of social and historical content mirrors the careful reconsideration of political methods and moral intentions among liberals in this period. These critics were engrossed by theories of method and form in their approach to both political action and literature, largely deflecting their attention away from any direct involvement with more substantial ideas or issues of socio-material content. Instead, materialist approaches to politics and culture were deemed by liberals in this period to be the crude ideological hallmark of the unreconstructed political Left and unsophisticated writers of naturalist fiction.

Over the following number of pages, I wish to briefly outline the difficulties with which Lionel Trilling and Philip Rahv each put forth arguments for a novelistic model that would hold in place "the excesses of aestheticism by instilling literature with a respect for social ideas" (Cooney, 1986 75).[17] Trilling's notion of a need for "moral

[16] "This way of thinking," according to Jancovitch, "led the South to value organic ways of thinking which sought to place contradictory elements in 'harmonious,' 'balanced,' or 'stable' relationships" (17).
[17] Cooney goes on to indicate the instability that originates in this attempt to wed modernist stylistics to radical politics: "Synthesis could not be achieved by reversing the one-sided emphasis of aestheticism and rushing to the opposite extreme – a preoccupation with social concerns and immediate politics at the

realism" at the heart of liberal politics is predicated upon his idea of how social relations are shaped by a process of continual conflict and transformation. As opposed to strictly materialist conceptions of "reality" as "hard" and "resistant," Trilling suggests that "culture is nothing if not a dialectic" (9). Such a nuanced understanding of cultural life is mapped, according to Trilling, through the imaginative labours of "certain artists who contain a large part of the dialectic within themselves, their meaning and power lying in their contradictions" (9). By "contain[ing] within themselves … the very essence of the culture," he argues that such artists "do not submit to serve the ends of any one ideological group or tendency" (9). Trilling gives particular praise to the achievements of European high-literary tradition, seeing in its complex and imaginative treatment of social manners a means of exploring the dialectical formations of cultural life: "[f]or our time the most effective agent of the moral imagination has been the novel of the last two hundred years" (222). For Trilling, therefore, the fluid and intricate sense of a "moral imagination" that lies at the heart of American liberalism finds suitable expression in the great literature of the past. By contrast, he sees the American naturalist fiction of the first half of the twentieth century as bereft of such novelistic ingenuity. In "Manners, Morals, and The Novel," Trilling castigates writers like Parrington, Dreiser and Farrell for being purveyors of low-brow and ideological depictions of "material reality." The popularity of this naturalist writing, according to Trilling, has impaired the development of an American tradition of writing that might be worthy of the European novel. What he wishes to encourage is a re-thinking of the American novel that will abandon the influences of leftist ideology for the greater aesthetic reaches of a literary model which is more suitably liberal in its political and moral outlook.

Yet by invoking formalist criticisms of naturalist content in fiction, Trilling's argument threatens to jettison what Schaub described as the "positivist (mimetic) expectation of external and social detail" (31) central to the politically themed literature

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expense of artistic quality. This was the position of the 'leftists' who were leading proletarian literature astray" (1986, 76).

of the left-liberal variety.[18] The tensions in Trilling's argument between questions of progressive political content and more disinterested or 'ahistorical' matters of literary style are evident in "The Meaning of a Literary Idea." In this essay, Trilling attempts to establish a role for political ideas within literary content that is compatible with his modernist influenced concept of form. Seeking to distance himself from the 'apolitical' formalism of the New Critics, he states: "say what we will about the 'purely' literary, the purely aesthetic values, we as readers know that we demand of our literature some of the virtues which define a successful work of systematic thought" (290). He goes on to argue that: "[i]deas … are not only not hostile to the creative process, as some think, but are virtually inevitable to it" (293). Trilling's flexible and imaginative concept of "moral realism" encourages what he calls an "intimate relationship between literature and ideas" that stands in stark contrast with the agit-style fictions of the left in which political concepts "tend to deteriorate into ideology" (286). By arguing for ideas in literature that do not "make the attempt at a formulated solution," he stresses that writers should exercise a "negative capability … [a] willingness to remain in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts" as a means to "seeing the full force and complexity of their subject matter" (298-9). Trilling thus argues in opposition to the New Critics by suggesting that high-literary form can be made serviceable to liberal principles of political thought and action. However, a clear tension exists between Trilling's insistence upon the continuing historicist value of fiction and his determination to wrest "reality" and political ideas from naturalism by subjecting them to the complex modulations of literary expression. In many ways, his suggestion that "[t]he novel … is a perpetual quest for reality" (212) echoes Ransom's notion of an "order of existence" peculiar to literature which redeems a superlative vision of life against other prosaic and positivist modes of explicating experience. Such a comparison lends credence to Brooks' claim in "The Formalist Critics" that "Trilling is really much closer to the so-called 'new critics' than he is aware" (1370).

[18] According to Jumonville, Trilling's literary criticism was "attempt[ing] to draw a responsible line … between the dangers of culture with too little social and political content (such as the New Critics), and culture with too much political or visionary content" (124).

Philip Rahv attempted to fashion a new vision of the American novel that would remain grounded in socio-political concerns, but which would provide "the aesthetic rendering of experience" ("The Cult of Experience," 24) necessary to wrest literature from the ideological dogma of the left. In "Paleface and Redskin," he discusses the need for such a balance between social content and aesthetic form in American fiction by outlining the problems inherent to the existing literary heritage:

> The fact is that the creative mind in America is fragmented and one-sided. For the process of polarization has produced a dichotomy between experience and consciousness – a dissociation between energy and sensibility, between conduct and theories of conduct, between life conceived as an opportunity and life conceived as a discipline (1)

Rahv ascribes the term "paleface" to a "high-brow" tradition of moral and intellectual "consciousness," "as [evidenced] in the case of Hawthorne and James" (2). The "redskin" is one in the line of Whitman, whose predilection for "experience" makes him a "'low-brow,' not because he is badly educated … but because his reactions are primarily emotional, spontaneous, and lacking in personal culture" (2). Making a connection between European tradition and "paleface" writing, Rahv underlines how this "high-brow" style appeals to the detached aesthetic sensibility of modernist-formalism. By contrast, the "redskin writer in America is a purely indigenous phenomenon" (4), who, by working within a "primacy of experience" and "relative immunity from abstraction" ("The Cult of Experience," 34), falls far short of the impersonal commitment to tradition and form that modernist critics like Eliot advocated. For Rahv, the "national literature suffers from the ills of a split personality" that can only be cured by a synthesis of both traditions in American writing.

This call for balance between both styles finds political expedience in an environment in which "the redskins are in command of the situation" ("Paleface and Redskin," 4). This particular incarnation of the "redskin" is to be found, for Rahv, in the naturalist fiction of the Left. Like Trilling, he calls into question the intellectual and aesthetic merits of a leftist literature that has concerned itself with "popular political creeds" and the demands of "semiliterate audiences" (4). "Unable to relate himself in

any significant manner to the cultural heritage" (4), the "redskin" writer of popular front fiction is seen by Rahv as part of a broader ideological attempt to hijack culture by the Left.[19] Similar to Trilling, Rahv sees in the high-literary or "paleface" sense of tradition a necessary bulwark against "flat reproductions of life" (3). At the same time, he wants to distance himself from "a fetishistic attitude toward tradition" (5) that has resulted in comparably "truncated works of art … products of cultivation that remain abstract because they fall short on evidence drawn from the sensuous and material world" (3). In thus trying to synthesise the dichotomous strands of American literary tradition, Rahv seeks to maintain, like Trilling, a balance between a sense of political (positivist) content and the aesthetic form emerging from "that new-fashioned sense of irony which at once expresses and modulates the conflicts in modern belief" ("The Cult of Experience," 24).

The Dialogical Interaction between Narrators in *I Married a Communist*

When reading the text of *I Married a Communist*, the extrinsic compatibility between both Nathan and Murray's narrative viewpoints is clearly evident. Words such as "error," "loss," "revenge" and "betrayal" infiltrate the speech of both men, denoting a somewhat fallen or tragedian view of history that contrasts with the positivist linearity of Ira's utopian rhetoric. This is a form of historicism which has analogues, as I have outlined, with aspects of the New York Intellectuals' attitudes toward ideology. Yet, despite this narrative mimicry in which both men appear to share the view articulated by Zuckerman that "[t]here's only error … [at] the heart of the world" (319), there is a an important distinction in how such a form of epistemological and moral uncertainty informs their efforts to make narrative sense of events over the past fifty years. Zuckerman has effectively withdrawn himself from the stage of human history by retreating into hermetic isolation, away from the conflicts and frustrations that have marked his desire for a narrative engagement with 'real' life in previous novels. He has thus sought a reprieve from the interplay of potency and impotence – "your

[19] In "Proletarian Literature: a Political Autopsy," Rahv states that: "Virtually all the theorists of proletarian culture are fetishists of ideology, which they naively equate with and substitute for culture" (13).

manipulation of the world and its manhandling of you" (72) – that has characterised his efforts to imprint his narrative authorship on the external world of "facts" in the past. By contrast, Murray is more representative of people like Trilling in the way that he seeks to redeem a distinctly liberal form of moral and political insight from the confusion and sense of "error" posed by events in post-war American life. In attempting to illustrate this distinction between himself and Murray, Zuckerman juxtaposes his own unwillingness to explicate his worldly experiences with the older man's continued efforts to extract some intellectual meaning from the broader historical events that he has lived through:

> that the puzzle continued to puzzle him, that clarification remained a vital need – more than surprised me: a sense of error settled over me, bordering on shame, for living to myself and keeping everything at such a distance. But then the sense of error vanished. There were no more difficulties I wished to create (151).

By focusing on such differences between both of their narrative approaches in the novel, I will examine how the more confused and reticent Zuckerman provides a foil to Murray's declarative moral thesis - resonant of New York Intellectual positions after the war - on history and human actions.

Before going on to discuss the text in greater detail, it is important to mention how critical responses to *I Married a Communist* have so far failed to fully probe this tension between the two narrators. Although framed by Zuckerman's voice, Murray Ringold's account of Ira's life is afforded a greater deal of space in the novel than the room allocated to his former pupil's narrative. As a result, Murray's particular interpretation of events assumes a certain position of authorial centrality that appears to go unquestioned by some readers of Roth's novel. Derek Parker Royal criticises the novel for "its relatively uncomplicated use of first-person narration" (2005, 116). He argues that this narrative strategy "stands in stark contrast to the ambiguous disclosures found in its companions" (116) within Roth's American trilogy. Debra Shostak, by contrast, manages to point out: "that Murray has an auditor, that this is a literally dialogic situation, in which the meaning of the story emerges from the interaction between speaker and listener" (250). Despite this appeal to Bakhtinian dialogism,

however, Shostak does not discuss any sense of disunity in the narrative relationship between Murray and Zuckerman. Instead, she argues that "Zuckerman's absolute fidelity to Murray's viewpoint" leaves the latter as "the authority in the text" (251). For Shostak, the novel is largely concerned with the "dialogic situation" between Nathan and Ira, and the way this narrative relationship engenders a crippling sense of self-division in Zuckerman: "Nathan's own retrospective view becomes central in the novel, because he can be seen as simply a less extreme and distorted version of Ira – like Murray, more rational and less violent, yet equally caught up in the dream of America" (251).

While my argument will address the ambivalence of Zuckerman's continued affection for his old mentor Ira, I also intend to focus upon something that Shostak appears to omit: the way in which Nathan's continued fascination with Ira makes him less "like Murray" at key stages of the novel. I would argue that by concentrating on how Zuckerman, as auditor, pays deference to "Murray's commanding presence" as the voice of "unquestioned truth in this book," Shostak fails to explore how Nathan's "long silences" (Shostak, 250) can be read in dialogic terms. Nathan's relative silence acts not only as a register of attentiveness and reverence toward Murray as speaker. It is also marked, at stages, by a sense of fatigue and incredulity with the clear tone of conviction expressed by his former school teacher's tendency toward "pedagogical crescendo" (*I Married a Communist*, 262) in explaining events. This more subtle dialogic interplay between two apparently mutual viewpoints emerges once the novel is read with Bakhtin's idea of "quasi-direct discourse" in mind. Shostak's assumed notion of "fidelity" between Murray and Zuckerman's narratives, I would argue, fails to address the frictions that inhabit the superficial level of harmony between separate voices in "quasi-direct" style. By contrast, my argument will underline the narrative dissonance that emerges from the manner in which these separate speakers interact within Roth's novel. In this spirit, my chapter will develop in two separate sections which aim to demonstrate Murray and Zuckerman's dialogically contrasting approaches to understanding the fifty or so years of American history that have elapsed since they last met.

Murray's Story

Murray's narrative is delivered with a similar sense of the "masculine authority uncorrected by piety" (2) that was integral to his inspiring performances as Zuckerman's boyhood English teacher. Central to Murray's pedagogic style is the value it places upon what he once emphasised to his pupils as "[c]ri-ti-cal think-ing (2). Presented by Murray to the youthful Zuckerman and his class mates as "the ultimate subversion" (2), "critical thinking" is intended to offer them access to decidedly masculine notions of independent thought and intellectual dissent. Zuckerman recalls how the "flinty fullness" (4) of Murray's speech, for which there was "no invisible line of propriety" (24), de-mystified high rhetoric and complex intellectual ideas for his young pupils. In many ways, Murray's discursive style as Nathan's teacher might be said to embody the synthesis "between conduct and theories of conduct" that Rahv had outlined as lacking in the American cultural tradition. Recalling the first time he spoke with both Ringold brothers together, Zuckerman tells of how each of them spoke to him with an emotional energy and vernacular ruggedness that appeared to blur the usual distinctions between matters of 'high' and 'low' cultural significance:

> You could stir together anything and everything: sports, politics, history, literature, reckless opionating, polemical quotation, idealistic sentiment, moral rectitude ... There was something marvellously bracing about it, a different and dangerous world, demanding, straightforward, aggressive, freed from the need to please (24)

However, the rhetorical conjunction of popular ("redskin") and intellectual ("paleface") styles in which "[y]ou could stir together anything and everything" that had marked Murray's performances as Zuckerman's teacher has undergone distinct modifications on their re-union. Having once demonstrated to his students how complex ideas could be made appealing by infusing them with a Whitmanesque charge of "visceral spontaneity" (1), Murray's speech now clearly outlines a sense of the very "dissociation between energy and [intellectual] sensibility" that Rahv had originally flagged as a problem within American culture. Murray is eager to distance himself from any earlier affiliation that he might have shown with the Popular Front sentiments of Ira by delivering to

Nathan a narrative interpretation of the post-war American experience in which his idea of "critical thinking" becomes inimical to the emotionally charged and popularised speech that he associates with his brother's Communist propaganda. Ira's emotive rhetoric is described by Murray as part of a broader degeneration of American civic life at the hands of simplistic ideologies and mass cultural discourses. In opposition to this perceived decline in intellectual and cultural modes of expression, Murray lays claim to a language of detached criticism that abstracts itself from the bold "visceral" appeal to popular sentiment that had shaped his original rhetorical style. After so many years, the combative sense of "freed[om] from the need to please" that Murray inculcated in others has been recast in the form of a temperate mode of independent reasoning; "critical thinking" in all its objective and high-cultural purity.

Described by Zuckerman as having attained a state "that is close to being totally dispassionate" (77), the aged Murray appears to be almost disembodied of private forms of longing (Eros) or anguish (Thanatos) in the text. In this regard, he seems to exist at an absolute remove from the more corporeal matters of personal desire and frustration which, as I will highlight, define both Ira and Zuckerman's engagements with the greater events of American history in the novel. This separation of mind from body – "sensibility" from "energy" – that occurs in Murray's life during the period of years since he was Zuckerman's teacher is reflective, I would suggest, of post-war liberal tendencies to value the virtues of independent intellectual criticism over their prior sense of political commitment to the material concerns and popular aspirations of the American masses. Like Trilling and others, Murray articulates an anti-ideological liberal philosophy which seeks, at all times, to keep intact its own pristine sense of moral and intellectual foundations by distancing itself completely from the "chiliastic" fervour of Ira and his Communist Party mentor, Johnny O'Day.

In citing the case of Ira's wife, Eve, and her complicity with the anti-Communist hearings against her husband, Murray explains how she was promptly dismissed as "just more of that flabby mass that is life" by the forces of ideological zeal, once they had

extracted from her that which "advances the righteous cause" (261). In contrast to the aggressive manner in which ideology tends to discard the relevance of individual experiences and motivations as surplus to its moral or historical imperatives, Murray is determined to outline the significant influence of such emotional and psychological impulses in shaping events and lives. In this way, he shares the Niebuhrian viewpoint – current among many disillusioned liberals in the early Cold War period – that stresses the ironic sense in which coherent ideologies of rational progress find great disparities with the highly flawed and complex basis of human behaviour. In support of this thesis, Murray explains elsewhere his view of how life assumes certain aspects of farce and irrationality, which function to discredit any teleological notion of a rational principle organising the movement of history:

> Maybe, despite ideology, politics, and history, a genuine catastrophe is always personal bathos at the core. Life can't be impugned for any failure to trivialize people. You have to take your hat off to life for the techniques at its disposal to strip a man of his significance and empty him totally of his pride (3)

Like Niebuhr and Trilling, therefore, Murray's numerous reflections in the text provide a keen awareness of how mankind's tragic – or tragi-comic in this instance – predicament cannot be successfully redeemed or reformed by grandiose ideologies of historical progress.

Yet despite his pretensions to holding a critical evaluation of history that places him beyond the delusions of ideology, Murray also comes to despair of a situation in which his much-vaunted intellectual ideals struggle to find a purchase on cultural life. Discussing the mass spectacle of anti-Communism, he states that: "I think of the McCarthy era as inaugurating the postwar triumph of gossip as the unifying credo of the world's oldest democratic republic ... the first flowering of the American unthinking that is now everywhere" (284). Murray's own experience as a suspected Communist makes evident this sense of the banality and intellectual inscrutability of McCarthyism. He explains how he had tried to find in his and Ira's accuser, Bryden Grant, something "more to him than a politician with a personal vendetta finding in the national obsession the means to settle a score" (9). Referring to how "it was still my wont in those days to

try to be reasonable about the unreasonable and to look for the complexity in simple things," Murray concludes that he was "mak[ing] demands upon my intelligence where none were really necessary" (9). Despite the ostensible appeal to moral and historical authority in Grant's mission to extricate the influence of Communism from American politics and culture, Murray realises from the experience that:

> Pettiness and vapidity can come on the grand scale too. What could be more *unwavering* than pettiness and vapidity? ... You don't need a developed view of life to be fond of power (9-10)

For Murray, the sense of moral righteousness that Grant evoked in protecting American democracy against Communist influences acted as a shallow means of concealing his personal urge to vilify others and achieve public acclaim. The post-war liberal view of how ideology appeals to irrational and violent human impulses to control and coerce others finds clear resonance in Murray's assessment of McCarthyism as a means of expiating personal ambitions on the "grand scale" of history. As a clear sighted liberal with an apparent lack of political illusions or distempered emotions, Murray inhabits a fluid space of open intellectual curiosity – a "vital center" – in which all ideological rigidities and mass cultural simplifications are subject to disavowal. Yet in illustrating how recent American history has been shaped by personal "pettiness" and anti-intellectual "vapidity," he also heralds a sort of apocalyptic entelechy of the unreasonable against which his "developed view of life" struggles to redeem any greater understanding of cultural experience.

Just as he argues that Bryden Grant finds vengeful pleasure in the moral crusade of anti-Communism, Murray describes his brother's utopian political vision as Ira's means of sublimating an unconscious reserve of personal anger and aggression. In outlining this connection between volatile passions and the convictions of ideology, Murray explains to Nathan how it is possible to: "indoctrinate an adult who is not too skilled in brainwork with the intellectual glamour of Big Sweeping Ideas, inculcate a man of limited intelligence, an excitable type who is as angry as Ira" (60). Ira's wife,

Eve, and "her [many] projects to deodorize life and make it palatable" (179) present Murray with another frustrating example of one whose personal longing for a sense of moral perfection has made her readily available to such forms of "embitterment and not thinking" (60). Her "actress's utopia of let's pretend" (179) has stripped Eve of the faculty for "critical thinking" that marks Murray's idea of an intelligent, complex and, thereby, moral subject. Puzzling over what aspects of personality lay beneath Eve's glittering Hollywood persona, Murray describes her as being "caught in her own impersonation" (157) and displaying a "dazzlement [that] has a logic all its own" (54). Having appeared to merge with the caricature of the victimised heroine that she repeatedly played as a silent movie star, Eve's obsession with her own innocence manifests itself in a perpetual pursuit for self-exculpation from guilt. As a result, she is made susceptible to utopian fantasies of purity and perfection that fail to recognise the postlapsarian sense of "error" and moral culpability that Murray's complex liberal philosophy articulates.

In contrast to those whom he describes as ideologically motivated by their emotions and individual pathologies, Murray purports to hold a critically reflective distance from events in his narrative. As Zuckerman explains, Murray appears to have disinvested himself of personal emotions and attained a somewhat transcendent "state of ardorlessness," by which he tries "to tell his story without too much error" (77). Through his despondent reaction to the malaise of "unthinking" into which the nation has declined, he demonstrates an anxiety about the mass cultural degradation of certain high standards of culture and thought that adequately reflects liberal intellectual positions in the post-war period. In attempting to "slough off many of the illusions" (Niebuhr, 36) of ideology in his narrative interpretation of events, Murray sees himself as the paragon of dispassionate critical rigour and a certain complex way of thinking that, according to him, provides an intellectual and moral bulwark against the gross delusions of those around him. In this sense, Murray views the abasement of critical and cultural values in American life from a disinterested intellectual height that claims to be free from the emotional prejudice and ideological purview associated with Ira's "overheated

relationship to everything" (16); an eschatological vantage point of intellectual excellence to where the 'fallen' culture may, eventually, be returned and restored.

This appeal to a transcendent notion of high-culture finds expression in Murray's idea of himself as one of "the few of us still engrossed by literature's scrutiny of things" (185). Throughout his narrative, he borrows references from various canonical texts, particularly those of Shakespeare, as a means of explicating his intellectual and moral thesis of history. In this way, Murray echoes people like Trilling and Rahv in so much as he finds in the literary past a means of redeeming some meaningful cultural perspective from the numerous dislocating experiences within modern American life. Much like the poetic voice in Eliot's "The Waste Land," Murray hopes that these allusions will work to incorporate the world of moral uncertainty and debased intellectual values that he describes into an immutable cultural order: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" ("The Waste Land," Line 430). This formalist-modernist view of "literature … [a]s a primary reality" (278) is set in opposition to Ira's Popular Front aesthetics. According to Murray, Ira is one of those "cheap propagandists, against which the only laws are aesthetic, laws of literary taste" (272). However, Murray's narrative inadvertently provides some interesting insights into the tensions and instabilities of his confident sense of himself as a dissenting voice of intellectual and literary authority within this appalling environment of cultural decline in America. As the following number of pages will make clear, Roth's novel dramatises the difficulties that Murray faces in trying to maintain an objective and dispassionate sense of "critical thinking" about certain past events in which he, too, has been emotionally involved. Furthermore, I will look at how Murray is unable to find in his intimate knowledge of canonical literary texts an adequate means of understanding and overcoming certain pivotal experiences of emotional chaos and intellectual bewilderment that have deeply scarred his personal life.

Murray argues against ideological simplifications of existence by suggesting that "normal life … is made up of twenty thousand little compromises every day" (263). Yet despite this sense of his intimate awareness of life's ultimate complexities and

contradictions, he presents a version of himself that somewhat "resist[s] the tyranny of compromise" (318) to which others are made subject in the novel. For example, when Zuckerman asks him how he was affected by six years of expulsion from his job as a public school teacher, following the anti-Communist hearings that were brought against him, Murray replies: "I don't think it took anything out of me" (14). Throughout the novel, Murray is reluctant to admit any sign of the emotional distress that he may have suffered at the hands of wider historical forces. He explains how his determination to continue working, despite being demoted from his position as a school teacher to a job as a vacuum salesman, enabled him to achieve "a better outlook on life" (13). When asked by Zuckerman whether such optimism would have been possible had he never been re-instated as a teacher, Murray insists:

> I think I would have made a fair living. I think I would have survived intact. I might have had some regrets. But I don't think I would have been affected temperamentally (13).

In contrast with his claim that being expelled from teaching had left no indelible mark on his own life, Murray recounts to Nathan how this "distressed" Ira: "I'd go as far as to say it ruined him" (15). Murray's "critical thinking" is based upon a negation of the emotional surfeit and irrational violence that underpin Ira's utopian politics. Zuckerman describes how "all that coherence of his" gave an impression of Murray as "an essentialist, that his character wasn't contingent, that wherever he'd found himself, even selling vacuum cleaners, he'd managed to find his dignity" (16). Zuckerman elaborates upon the stark differences in temperament between both brothers by suggesting that Murray was, in effect: "Ira with a practical, clear, well-defined social goal, Ira without the heroically exaggerated ambitions, without that passionate, overheated relationship to everything, Ira unblurred by impulse and the argument with everything" (16).

The "state of ardorlessness" through which Murray appears to have overcome the emotional vagaries of the self resembles the heightened level of disinterested tranquillity that Zuckerman aspires to achieve by withdrawing into exile from social existence and "receding from the agitation of the autobiographical" (72). By abandoning any

involvement in daily social life, Zuckerman has sought "to decontaminate and absolve" himself "from the striving" (72) that had previously marked his own particular "argument with everything." However, Murray appears to have achieved this detached position in relation to certain historical events to which he, too, has been participant. Nowhere does he appear to have been pulled apart by the emotional demands of what Zuckerman calls "your batteredness and your resentment, your appeasement of the world and your defiance of the world" (72). Murray thus stands both in and above the events that he narrates. He highlights the intellectual poverty and emotional turmoil that have shaped recent history, while at the same time appearing immune to such forms of "unthinking." Unlike Ira and, it would appear, Zuckerman, "critical thinking," as a corrective to the flaws of a fallen human condition, has achieved its apotheosis in Murray. As Zuckerman reflects: "[i]n Murray Ringold, I thought, human dissatisfaction has met its match" (77-8). However, the neat narrative conclusions that Murray makes about past events, particularly as they becomes framed by Zuckerman, are shown to contain evidence of his own personal experiences of "dissatisfaction." As a result, certain gaps emerge in Murray's objective notion of "critical thinking," which bear witness to his own emotional entanglement in the compromises and contradictions that he sees as illustrative of the wider American experience after World War Two.

Throughout the novel, Ira succumbs to various moments of extreme emotional outrage and uncontrollable aggression, by which he appears to lose all sense of the rational objectivity that his ideological outlook presumes. According to Murray, these volatile outbursts mark a horrifying return of certain unconscious instincts for rage and violence that originate in Ira's emotionally distraught childhood, suffered at the hands of an aggressive father. Murray explains how the high-pitched tendency toward unreasonable levels of anger never quite left his brother, despite the sense of a "civilizing path" (294) that his socialist idealism furnished for him. He describes Ira's commitment to the progressive vision of the Communist Party as merely a shallow means of sublimating such wayward aggression:

All that endless outraged rhetoric. Going on and on when what this huge man really wanted to do was to lash out. The talk was the way to blunt those desires (122-3).

Murray informs Zuckerman about Ira's vengeful plans to kill Eve, following her betrayal of him to his accusers as a Communist Party member. As Murray explains, despite all of "the civilizing accommodations" and sense of "moral correction" (123) inherent to his Marxist political philosophy, the violence and brutality associated with Ira's "uncorrected first self" (297) found continued expression through this intense form of retributive rage. The manner in which Ira was "returned to the violence where it had all begun" (297) by Eve's act of betrayal can be read in terms of the psychological experience of trauma. The violence and emotional disequilibrium pervading Ira's turbulent childhood acts as a trauma that he had attempted to repress or leave behind: "Ira's whole life was an attempt to defuse the violent impulse" (292). Yet despite his efforts to find an ordered and impersonal vision of life through certain universalising ideals about the emancipation of the American "common man," Ira is persistently forced to re-visit and repeat the horrific emotional turmoil that had characterised his difficult past. As I have discussed in the introductory chapter, the varying incarnations of desire as rage and sexual appetite in Roth's fiction function as corollaries to the thanatological experience of a lack or incompletion within traumatic experience. The "residue of a very, very old disappointment" (180) arising from Ira's troubled past produces in him a desire for self-integration and coherence, the repeated frustration of which results in his many enraged outbursts. The periodical re-surfacing of certain types of volatile behaviour from beneath his rational veneer as a Communist ideologue indicates the delayed impact of an overwhelmingly traumatic sense of origins, which, for Ira, remains inexplicable and yet inescapable at the same time.

Not only does Ira's sense of traumatic incompletion find expression in recurring moments of rage, but it also fuels his desire for the domestic security of a home and family with Eve. Murray describes how such a privatised or "bourgeois" (281) form of longing conflicted with Ira's commitment to the collectivist cause of Communism:

> The personal kept bursting out of Ira, militant and single-minded though he would try to be … The contradictions were indisputable. The personal openness and the Communist secrecy. The home life and the party. The need for a child, the desire for a family – should a party member with his aspirations care about having a child like that? (83)

Such personal conflicts have made Ira ideologically unsound, unsuitable for the rigorous commitment to abstract thought and rational action that is exemplified by his Communist Party mentor, Johnny O'Day. As Zuckerman remarks, Ira did not have "a heart without dichotomies, a heart like the enviably narrow O'Day's, unequivocal, ready to renounce everyone and everything except the revolution" (238). Murray concurs with this idea, criticising O'Day for being completely blind to "the failure of purity" (289) in human affairs: "[n]ever in his life had O'Day been this with this one, and that with that one, and a third person with somebody else" (289). However, Murray's somewhat idealised concept of himself as an un-blinkered and highly rational intellectual would also seem to situate him beyond what he calls "the fickleness of all creatures" (289). As a somewhat coherent and emotionally controlled individual, he appears to share with O'Day a determination to exempt himself from "the unique markings of the species, the thousand and one dualities that twist its nature into the human knot" (280). Murray's personal abhorrence for the multiple and irreconcilable impositions that the emotionally charged Ira "demanded from himself" (319) would therefore seem to highlight his outright disgust with those very "human" inconsistencies which he sees as anathema to ideology.

In thus presenting himself as the cool and detached arbiter of events, Murray is placed at a careful distance from the traumatic fissures that comprise what Zuckerman labels "the sanity of an expansive, disorderly existence" (232). Murray describes Ira's Communist ideology as a form of sublimated violence; a "civilizing path into life" (294) that helped him to progress from the harshness of their upbringing under an aggressive father. Yet despite having shared the same background as Ira, the adult Murray is reluctant to disclose any sense of a comparable trauma that might lay beneath his own "civilizing path … [of] books, college, teaching school" (294). However, Murray does suggest that Ira's repressed instincts for violence are "no rarity," but indicative of a

broader phenomenon of "[m]en trying not to be violent" (298). This comment helps to re-focus our attention back on to the undisclosed subject of his own experiences of personal anguish and how they have engendered his desire for a sense of completion and clarity in life. By doing so, Murray's narrative begs the question as to what less coherent or irrational impulse may lay beneath his own "civilizing path" of "critical thinking."

I have already indicated how Murray shares with people like Niebuhr and Trilling a willingness to stave off the influence of irrational and destructive forces upon his life by remaining vigilantly steadfast to the practice of "critical thinking." However, as I wish to suggest, Murray's mode of intellectual reasoning is more closely related to certain destabilising forms of unreason and personal desire than he is prepared to admit. There are moments within Murray's narrative in which his self-appointed position as the disinterested educator and sober voice of reason is informed by a contradictory tone of emotional disquiet. For example, vain attempts by him and his wife, Doris, to counsel Ira upon the bitter disappointments and angry confrontations that arose from his marriage to Eve produce within Murray a certain level of emotional frustration. Reflecting upon these situations, he tells Zuckerman how he "would get unsettled by the irrational, particularly when it emanated from my brother" (85). Murray admits that "I was an intense fellow myself in those days" and stresses how, in setting Ira along a path of reasoned thinking, "I was more vehement than I should have been" (85). Such moments suggest how Ira's volatile temperament had the effect of unnerving Murray's calm and reasoned tone. The latter's unflagging efforts to be "reasonable about the unreasonable" thus demonstrate, at times, an uncompromising and distempered desire to bleed life of its irrational emotions. By contrast, Doris finds matters of human desire and vulnerability far less repugnant than her husband. She makes various interesting remarks upon how Murray had tried to cajole Ira into "do[ing] what you have wanted him to do all along" (251) by persuading his brother to abandon his unreasonable delusions about life. Yet despite such suggestions that Murray has tried to brow-beat others into seeing matters in the same precise and objective manner that he himself pertains to uphold, he is keen to show how he "didn't really overstate the case" (85) in arguing with Ira. As is

evident in the advice that he gives to his daughter on "the problem of impassioned speech" (76-7), Murray claims to have domesticated his personal emotions by means of a rational intellect:

> It's not being angry that's important, it's being angry about the right things. I told her, Look at it from the Darwinian perspective. Anger is to make you effective (77)

As the novel draws to a conclusion, however, Murray reluctantly reveals evidence of how his "civilizing path" away from what he sees as the moral and intellectual disorder that characterised not only his upbringing, but wider American history since World War Two, is marked by a sense of reversal. This crisis within Murray's acutely moral idea of liberal intellectualism is intertwined with the irrepressible experiences of irrational violence that lay at the centre of Ira's life. The sense of a shared trauma among both Ringold men is made evident when Murray reveals to Zuckerman how Ira's desire to kill Eve recalled a hidden act of murder that his brother had committed as a young man. Murray admits to Zuckerman of his own complicity with this earlier crime. He explains how he had helped to conceal such a dreadful incident in the greater hope of affecting some kind of moral reform upon Ira's violent tendencies. Yet this sense of liberal good-faith in the effectiveness of persuasive reasoning and moral rehabilitation is traumatically shattered by the shocking evidence of Ira's unmodified potential for homicide, following the publication of Eve's memoir:

> I was defeated. I'd spent a lifetime teaching myself to be reasonable in the face of the unreasonable, teaching what I liked to call vigilant matter-of-factness, teaching myself and teaching my daughter and trying to teach my brother. And I'd failed. Un-Iraing Ira was impossible. Being reasonable in the face of the unreasonable was impossible (303-4)

Murray confesses to Zuckerman his failure to "discharge my obligation to humanity" (301) by helping to cover up his brother's crime. Ira's later intentions to kill again suggest that a profound sense of moral failure and guilt has thus far gone unmentioned in Murray's narrative claim to have been untarnished by life's propensity for "error." As a result of this unsolicited (re-)emergence of a concealed trauma at the centre of Murray's virtuous notion of "critical thinking," he, too, is shown to be somewhat debilitated by the

vertiginous moral and intellectual void that recent American history has presented to him. Just like Ira and Zuckerman, therefore, Murray has also failed to maintain an "intact" sense of himself.

Murray's formalist idea of literature as a mode of experience that retrieves some aesthetic pattern of cohesion from the disunities and chaos of modern historical experience is made vulnerable by the impact of this repeating trauma. In his confession to Zuckerman of Ira's homicidal act, he explains how he had expected "the Dostoyevskian reality … to kick in" (300). Murray had thought that, like Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, Ira would experience a sense of moral guilt followed by some experience of atonement for committing murder. Yet although "Raskolnikov … reflects all his life on his cold-bloodedness," Ira the "action machine" (300) undergoes no anguished reflection over his deed. Instead, his impulse toward violence remains part of an "uncorrected first self" which is heedless of his many efforts to "resurrect his life, his bending backward to stand up straight" (300-01). However, despite the lack of any remission for Ira of his "original sin" of murder, Murray is determined to find in literature a means by which to redeem some ethical understanding from the traumatic sense of guilt and sorrow that he himself suffers as a result of his brother's actions.

As on several other occasions throughout his story, Murray appeals to Shakespeare in order to frame the sense of emotional and moral uncertainty that he experiences in relation to events. He tells Zuckerman that the disorienting sense of shock he experienced on realising how Ira's murderous potential had remained undiminished after so many years found expression for him in a line from *Twelfth Night*: "[a]nd thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges" (302). Murray describes how "I couldn't get that line out of my head" (302). By an almost incantatory repetition of "those ten words, the phonetic webbing, the blanket omniscience," he tells Zuckerman, "I felt I was being asphyxiated inside Shakespeare" (302). In many ways, Murray's recourse to a specific literary quotation in this case is symptomatic of the trauma victim's pathology in so much as he is repeatedly trying to make known or sensible the precise nature of the

bewildering event through his obsessive repetition of Shakespeare's line. However, there is also a sense here of how the traumatic moment is continually being repressed by the way in which he finds refuge "inside Shakespeare" from the full horror of its overwhelming impact. In a fashion that recalls his earlier teaching style during the 1940s, Murray undertakes to diagram the phonetic stresses of this line for Zuckerman. Although he is attempting to emphasise the heightened tragedian quality of his despair by referring to *Twelfth Night*, there is a sense in which his formalist attention to Shakespeare's finely constructed sentence has shielded Murray from the direct significance of the traumatic event that that he is attempting to understand. By thus immuring his experiences in the "blanket omniscience" and "phonetic webbing" of Shakespeare's words, the literary formalist Murray attempts to discover in the perfectly constructed artifice a means of transcending the particular and fragmentary elements of 'real' life. In this way, he seeks to re-locate his sense of personal "error" and moral failing within the broader, universal "order of things" that is furnished for him by canonical works of literature. Yet by using a particularly close reading of *Twelfth Night* as a means by which to find self-protection from the unbearable sorrow that he faces as a result of Ira's actions, Murray merely buries an experience that will return to haunt him later on. It is this very lack or inassimilable quality within traumatic experience that renders vulnerable his formalist idea of the high-literary text as a "primary reality" which provides a redeeming sense of unity and meaning to the turbulence and self-dividing aspects of life outside of literature.

Murray's narrative withholds, until last, the revelation of an even greater trauma that further problematises his elevated position as the moral and intellectual voice of reason in the novel. He explains to Zuckerman his guilt over the death of his wife, Doris, who was killed by a thief on her way home from work in Newark. Murray blames the murder upon his own refusal to leave the old Jewish neighbourhood of Newark, despite its transformation into a crime-ridden wasteland and a site of violent racial antagonism. Having remained living and teaching in an increasingly dangerous city out of a stringently ethical sense of pedagogical commitment to "the disadvantaged of Newark,"

Murray explains how Doris's death marks "the price [paid] for my civic virtue" (317). This grossly misdirected sense of moral obligation has taught him that:

> When you loosen yourself, as I tried to, from all the obvious delusions – religion, ideology, Communism – you're still left with the myth of your own goodness. Which is the final delusion. And the one to which I sacrificed Doris (317-8)

In these passages, Murray appears to gradually confront the crippling realisation that you cannot "loosen yourself" from the forms of error and self-deception that he locates in other lives, such as those of Ira and Eve. The rigorous intellectual approach with which he has attempted to carve out for himself a certain perspective of "moral realism" has produced its own blinkered philosophy. As a result of such a purblind attitude toward his own "goodness" as a man of intellectual and ethical self-discipline, Murray has failed to circumvent what Trilling called "the dangers of the moral life itself."

Zuckerman is amazed by the final instalment to Murray's story, wondering sorrowfully: "[w]hy hadn't he told me about Doris earlier?" (318). Contemplating how "[t]his too happened to him," he realises that the elder Ringold brother's life has been "committed to a constructive course that is now an illusion, to formulations and solutions that will no longer wash" (318). Armed with this new knowledge, Zuckerman elaborates upon the fact that:

> You control betrayal on one side and you wind up betraying somewhere else. Because it's not a static system. Because it's alive. Because everything that lives is in movement. Because purity is petrifaction. Because purity is a lie. Because unless you're an ascetic paragon like Johnny O'Day and Jesus Christ, you're urged on by five hundred things (318).

The various acts of (self-)betrayal that have haunted Murray's personal history function as the absent trauma around which his life-long search, undiminished at the age of 90, for an intelligible and moral explanation of events has been constructed. His deferred admission to a sense of overwhelming remorse over certain tragic events suggests how such unassimilated moments of trauma continue to make a delayed impact upon him, despite his various attempts to rationalise such difficulties out of existence. For

Zuckerman, Murray's narrative search for exactitude and clarity is thus ruptured by an equal sense of the irrationality and incoherence by which his former teacher has been defining the post-war American experience:

> We could have sat on my deck for six hundred nights before I heard the entire story of how Murray Ringold … had failed to elude the turmoil of his time and place and ended up no less a historical casualty than his brother. This was the existence that America had worked out for him – and that he'd worked out for himself by thinking, by taking *his* revenge on his father by cri-ti-cal think-ing, by being reasonable in the face of no reason (318)

Zuckerman suggests here that the "entire story" of Murray's life can never be fully known or made subject to clear moral assessment in the way that his old school teacher has been seeking to explain events throughout the novel. Unlike Murray's idea of how literature redeems a certain liberal-moral purpose from life's many fluctuations and contingencies, Zuckerman is more intimately aware of how his own writing has involved a complicated and, at times, painful sense of "betrayal" and "error" in its efforts to understand what is 'real' about the self and others.

As the two men begin to part at the novel's close, Murray's voice once more enters the narrative. In an effort to deflect attention away from the recently acknowledged gaps in his sense of pedagogical or intellectual authority, he directs the narrative focus back toward his critical appraisal of Ira's emotional flaws. He re-iterates to Zuckerman how Ira was "a man perpetually hungering after his life … he could never construct one that fit" (319). However, when he begins to summate that "one's errors always rise to the surface," Zuckerman interjects, in an effort to acknowledge how this judgement also embraces both his and Murray's experiences:

> "It's all error," I said. "Isn't that what you've been telling me? There's only error. *There's* the heart of the world. Nobody finds his life. That *is* life." (319).

Zuckerman indicates here how both he and Murray also share in the sense of failure and loss that characterised Ira's suffering. By declaring that "[n]obody finds his life," Zuckerman suggests that we lack any fixed sense of a 'real' or origin upon which to anchor our various narrative efforts to understand experience. As I will discuss in greater

depth in the next section, Zuckerman has sought refuge from the various personal and professional agonies caused by this traumatic knowledge of life by undertaking a form of self-imposed isolation from the world of 'real' people and things. Yet as one who still seeks to garner some moral lesson from "the turmoil of his time and place," Murray remarks to Zuckerman: "I'm surprised to see you out of the world like this" (320). He warns his former pupil against the allure of exile and isolation from the greater historical scene: "[b]eware the utopia of the shack in the woods, the oasis defense against rage and grief" (315). Yet as his revelations about Doris indicate, Murray has sought in "critical thinking" his own form of refuge, designed to keep at bay his "rage and grief" at her loss. His particular brand of intellectualism acts as his own utopia, isolating him from the buried knowledge that his life, too, has failed to follow a path of moral reason.

Zuckerman's Story

Unlike Murray, Zuckerman can in no way lay claim to have "remain[ed] intact" throughout his adult existence. Rather, like Ira, Zuckerman has undergone the many fractious ordeals of "a man perpetually hungering after his life." However, having escaped to a secluded mountain-top cabin, he now lives at a safe distance from the confusion and suffering that his efforts to transform 'real' life into fiction had caused in earlier novels. Determined not to examine the traumatic wounds that have led him to live in exile from day to day social existence, Zuckerman declines to elaborate upon his personal history in *I Married a Communist*:

> my seclusion is not the story here. It is not a story in any way. I came here because I don't want a story any longer. I've had my story (71)

Similar to Murray, Zuckerman seeks to control the manner in which the unruliness of the "personal ke[eps] bursting out" of his narrative account by affecting a certain heightened distance from the story that he relates about Ira. Disavowing what he sees as the complicated drama of his private life, Zuckerman seeks to embody the role of the literary master, emptied of the personal in his detached commitment to the production of

high-literature. By thus quieting the self in this novel and its companions within the American trilogy, Zuckerman attempts to move his fictional subject away from the difficult personal history that dominated the *Zuckerman Bound* books and *The Counterlife*. His withdrawal into this disciplined form of private living is reminiscent of the ascetic ideal once personified by E.I. Lonoff, the literary master to whose home a younger Zuckerman had made pilgrimage in *The Ghost Writer*. Explaining to another character in *American Pastoral* how his decision to live alone has allowed him to become dedicated to the vocation of "[t]he single-minded writer," Zuckerman recalls his visit to Lonoff in the earlier novel:

> I met a famous writer when I was just starting out. Nobody mentions him much anymore, his sense of virtue is too narrow for readers now, but he was revered back then. Lived like a hermit. Reclusion looked awfully austere to a kid. He maintained it solved his problems. Now it solves mine (*American Pastoral*, 63).

As my introduction suggests, this is a notion of authorial anonymity by which Zuckerman seeks to immunise both his work and personal life against the "contaminant" (*The Human Stain*, 42) of erotic desire and its attendant thanatological complications. In doing so, he attempts to remove himself as a corporeal and desiring presence within his fiction. Yet despite the aged Zuckerman's sexual impotence, notable aspects of personal desire and anguish do keep "bursting out" of the narrative that he delivers in *I Married a Communist*.

Zuckerman tells us how his decision to "lose contact with history" contrasts greatly with Murray, who holds the sense of narrative conviction and stamina necessary to: "for hours on end, work to regain possession of it" (262). Yet by assuming a certain level of the "cooling" disinterestedness that Murray evinces, Zuckerman is able to re-direct his narrative focus onto the problems of historical subjectivities other than his own in *I Married a Communist*. Paradoxically, in the very moment of personal detachment from history, Zuckerman finds a narrative point of re-entry into the events of the recent American past via the personal trials of first Ira, then Murray. This narrative strategy can be understood in relation to the notion of the trauma witness. By witnessing how both

Murray and Ira have each seen their contrasting progressive visions of America defeated, Zuckerman is able to re-visit the sense of disillusionment that has resulted in his own self-imposed exile from the world. While the drama of Zuckerman's turbulent adulthood as the embattled author goes unspoken in *I Married a Communist*, a sense of the biographical development of both the man and writer can be reconstructed from the account of his early involvement in the life of Ira. In recalling his friendship with Ira, Zuckerman reveals how he, too, in a fashion similar yet also different to both Ringold brothers, became affected by a growing realisation that certain progressive ideas about American historical potential, highly persuasive to his adolescent imagination following victory in World War Two, were no longer tenable.

Zuckerman's friendship with Ira marked a highly important stage in his maturation from adolescence into manhood and literary authorship. His early fascination for the "common man" (38) hero that Ira appears to embody is described as the result of an "idealism" that "was fed … by novels about heroic Americans who fought against tyranny and injustice, champions of liberty for America and for all mankind" (25). Having begun his political tutelage under the rhetorical bombast of Howard Fast's *Citizen Tom Paine*, Zuckerman describes how Norman Corwin's radio play, *On a Note of Triumph*, inspired in him a heroic reaction toward World War Two as being a victory for the "little man" over tyranny: "the revolution that confirmed the reality of the myth of a national character to be partaken of by all" (38). Zuckerman, who begins to write plays about working class struggles in emulation of Corwin, recalls his adolescent obsession with a literature whose emotional vitality and popular sentiments marked it as "redskin" in the same manner as Rahv saw 1930s Popular Front fiction: "Whitman claimed America for the roughs, Norman Corwin claimed it for the little man" (38). Describing this leftist surge of national euphoria in the immediate post-war period as expressive of a "popular culture [that] was sufficiently connected to the last century to be susceptible still to a little language," Zuckerman explains how this spirit of political idealism fostered for him a triumphal sense of the collective national experience: "America had been scaled down and personalized … that was the enchantment not only

of Norman Corwin but of the times" (39).

Nowhere is this epic sense of American history more "personalized" for the young Zuckerman than through his friendship with Ira. Quoting lines from Tom Paine's "Common Sense" that are also re-used in Fast's novel, Ira leaps straight from the politically inspired fiction that the young Zuckerman had been so enthralled by: "the America that was my inheritance manifested itself in the form of Ira Ringold" (189). By befriending Ira and serving as a sort of political protégé to him, Zuckerman finds himself immersed in a national "inheritance" whose universalising ideals of freedom and liberty offer him a new sense of identity beyond the residual marginalia of his ethnic community. This mytho-heroic idea of American origins that transcend differences such as region, class, race and ethnicity finds repeated expression in each of the novels within Roth's later Zuckerman trilogy. Yet despite how being Jewish and American appears to be made compatible by the "common man" ideology that the young Zuckerman embraces, a certain clash between ethnic and national affiliations still exists for him in *I Married a Communist*: "I was a Jewish child, no two ways about that, but I didn't care to partake of the Jewish character … I wanted to partake of the national character" (39). This sense of a divided sense of cultural belonging is dramatised by the competing notions of loyalty that he begins to feel toward both his father and Ira, who is described as the first of many paternal surrogates that influence the young writer's development. I will return to this difficult issue of Zuckerman's Jewish heritage and his desire to abandon such origins later in my argument. I will suggest that, as an unregistered trauma of social marginality, Zuckerman's Jewish experience continues to demand some belated form of recognition from him. As an inerasable trauma, therefore, he is unable to fully to disown his familial heritage for the deracinated notion of an American cultural identity that he discovers through Ira.

Zuckerman's development as an avid student of a distinctly "redskin" style of American literature begins to decline alongside his interest in Ira's political tutelage. The aggression with which Ira attempts to enforce his sense of ideological coherence upon

situations leads Zuckerman to realise how the aesthetic possibilities associated with such a political doctrine may be limited. While he recalls "memories of how I used to gorge myself on his words" (89), Zuckerman eventually becomes exasperated with the "sheer repetition" and "redundancy of that rhetoric" (216) issued forth by Ira. Eager to explore fresh cultural and aesthetic territories, Zuckerman's growing irritation with Ira's speech is described as part of the same expansive process of discovery that had earlier marked his departure from the world of his Jewish family into that of national politics: "[t]he tearing away from my father, the straining of filial affection prompted by my infatuation with Ira, was now being replicated in my disillusionment with him" (194). The moment at which he feels "so savagely bored by him [Ira]" (216) coincides with Zuckerman's departure to university, where he describes being "transformed into a descendant not just of my family but of the past, an heir to a culture even grander than my neighborhood's" (218). Under the guidance of a new mentor, Leo Glucksman, Zuckerman becomes exposed to a distinctly "paleface" notion of artistic style that conflicts with the ideological interest in political content that had so characterised his "redskin" literary influences. Leo warns Zuckerman of the cultural dangers posed to art and expression by the "common man" ideology of Corwin, Fast and Ira: "[t]he workingman will conquer us all – out of his mindlessness will flow the slop that is this philistine country's cultural destiny" (218). In contrast to what he sees as the cheap propagandist tenor of political literature, Glucksman valorises art's "task … to impart the nuance, to elucidate the complication, to imply the contradiction" (223).

Much inspired by the Southern New Critics, Leo holds to a formalist belief that rigorously opposes ideological evaluations of the political and social function of literary content: "[t]he militant introduces a faith, a big belief that will change the world, and the artist introduces a product that has no place in that world" (224). In contrast to Ira, Leo endorses another type of militancy by exhorting Zuckerman to "fight for the *word*" (218) and uphold the elite exemption of serious literature from what he sees as the banal ideological concerns of naturalist fiction. This view of disinterested literary form is one that has close parallels with Murray's criticism of ideology and mass culture. However,

whereas Murray is a liberal in the mould of Trilling, Leo is a committed New Critic who stands firmly against any notion of historicist content within literature. As his own narrative strategy in *I Married a Communist* indicates, this idea of high-aesthetic tradition – first introduced to him by Leo and later exemplified by Lonoff – is one that has continued to shape Zuckerman's efforts to write fiction. Yet despite the influence that such a rarefied notion of literature plays throughout the Zuckerman novels, he is never fully able to renounce or master his social and biographical experiences in the name of a higher aesthetic purpose. As I will demonstrate over the following number of pages, the various conflicts and erotic entanglements involved in his life as a writer have left Zuckerman incapable of adhering to Leo's formalist credo of the artist as one who must achieve: "aesthetic mastery over everything that drives you to write in the first place – your outrage, your politics, your grief, your love!" (219).

The development of Zuckerman's literary imagination that is traced in *I Married a Communist* does involve a certain rejection of his early enthusiasm for the epic history of the American "common man" and the palpable sense of a social 'real' that it located in experiences of labour and class. Yet despite Ira's waning tutelary influence and the emergence of Leo as a new and exciting pedagogical inspiration, the youthful Zuckerman does not undergo a clean break with the "redskin" culture of the Left in *I Married a Communist*. Following the harsh indictment handed out to one of his Popular Front style plays by Leo, Zuckerman pays a visit to Ira's inspiring tutor in Marxist politics, Johnny O'Day. In an effort to successfully gain knowledge of leftist ideas that would not be as vulnerable to the many contradictions or charged by the same degree of emotional volatility that he came to find deplorable in Ira's political rhetoric, Zuckerman enlists as a disciple of this committed Communist ideologue. As a man "who is without all that stuff pulling Ira in twenty directions" (235), O'Day leads an exemplary life of harrowing self-abnegation that has allowed him to remove all the emotional and personal barriers that marked Ringold's conflicted efforts to serve the Marxist revolutionary cause. Zuckerman describes how the uncompromised unity between O'Day's personal life and his political ideas about social conditions expressed itself in a

"speech [that] was a pretext for nothing else … it appeared to rise from the core of his brain that is *experience*" (231). In the consistent and unambiguous "tang of the real" (231) inflecting O'Day's words, Zuckerman believes that he has discovered a source of political and aesthetic expression that was somewhat lacking in Ira's speech. Inspired by the ascetic form of self-denial by which O'Day lives, Zuckerman determines to renounce the personal, "bourgeois" influences of his family home and the literary education that he has recently begun under Leo. In an earnest commitment to the cause of American workers, he declares: "I would be nothing but the instrument of their will … nothing but rectitude" (235).

Yet despite his enthusiasm for emulating O'Day's disciplined commitment to political activism, Zuckerman is unable to affect a similar feat of self-abandonment to "the hypercharged medium that is history" (236). As I have already suggested, the "rectitude" demanded by O'Day's mono-linear vision of world revolution is one which aggressively dismisses the sense of contingency that both Zuckerman and Murray have come to realise is attendant upon life's various forms of "betrayal" and "error." In terms of his literary ambitions, Zuckerman is made acutely aware that language and writing do not, as O'Day's ideological rhetoric might suggest, summon the 'real' in any immediate sense. For example, in his attempt to incorporate O'Day's political ideas and "argot" (229) into a play, he realise that the Popular Front language which he so aspired to emulate was not fully consummate with its inflexible notion of 'real' historical conditions: "I wanted to write about things that seemed important … [but] what with the words at my disposal then, I instantly transformed everything into agitprop anyway, thus losing within seconds whatever was important about the important and immediate about the immediate" (229). As a result of this growing awareness, Zuckerman soon abandons the historical fantasies about "[t]he fight for American equality" (234) that he briefly held while under the political instruction of O'Day.

In *I Married a Communist*, Zuckerman and Murray both cast indicting judgments on the aesthetic limitations involved in O'Day's militant sense of engagement with "*the*

real thing" (236) of material historical necessity. As a result, the text appears to support a notion of fiction, somewhat borrowed from Leo's formalist argument, as independent and free from any such narrow political interests. However, this antinomy between the formalist notion of aesthetic autonomy and leftist ideas about how art should reflect a certain picture of social life is not upheld in any neat either/or fashion by Roth's novel. Instead, there exists a continuing tension between the claim that fiction writing exists in separation from the 'real' world and the manner in which external social forces influence literary creativity in *I Married a Communist*. As my introductory chapter has illustrated, this complex inter-mediation between the realms of the aesthetic and the 'real' is something that has overwhelmingly influenced Roth's body of work. In many ways, *I Married a Communist* explores the origins of how this fraught relationship between exterior 'reality' and the internal imagination of the author have shaped the development of the writer (Zuckerman) as a young man. As I will discuss below, what this particular dynamic between world and text produces is a peculiar synthesis of "redskin" and "paleface" styles that Roth himself describes as "redface" (*Reading Myself and Others*, 77).

Various commentators have discussed how tensions between ideological faith and independent aesthetic expression operate within *I Married a Communist*. Such critics have tended to see the novel's critique of leftist ideology as lending authority to Leo's formalist idea that "the particularising impulse *is* literature … is not to simplify" (223). For example, James Wood has discussed Roth's treatment of leftist politics in this novel as "a lesson about how ideology flattens character" (1998, 40). Yet for Wood, Roth's pointed efforts to deliver such a "lesson" involve an ironically "strange squandering of a novel" (40). He suggests that Roth's decision to make this argument about how the formal qualities of literature resist the rehearsed jargon of propaganda "cannot be done without flattening the novel; it is like using an orchestra to prove that the oboist was off-key" (40). A little less damning than Wood's judgment of Roth's "failure as a novelist of politics" (42), Mark Shechner shares a similar evaluation of the novel's aesthetic opposition to the "canned history" (2003, 178) of Communist ideology.

He alludes to the novel's treatment of "Leftists … as victims of their own agitprop vocabularies and dogmatic temperaments" (176). He argues that Roth's aesthetic opposition to such ideological simplicities is grounded in the novel's complex tragedian structure, as furnished by Murray's Shakespearian analysis of events. In similar fashion, David Brauner lends novelistic authority to "Murray's Aristotlean analysis of his brother's 'catastrophe,'" dismissing what he sees as Zuckerman's more sympathetic portrayal of Ira as biased by a "Whitmanesque enthusiasm for the America of his childhood" (2007, 154). For Shechner and Brauner, therefore, Roth's text makes a clear choice between "paleface" (Aristotlean) notions of artistic form over the more visceral and emotive aspects of Ira's "redskin" (Whitmanesque) approach to culture.

Perhaps most interesting in this field of critical attention is Ross Posnock's reading of *I Married a Communist* within the context of "literary intellectuals in midcentury America … [who were] dismayed by the coarsening of taste on the Stalinist Left" (2006, 51). He discusses the manner in which "Leo offers a stern and needed corrective to Nathan's tutelage under Ira" (51). Posnock suggests that this new phase in the young Zuckerman's aesthetic development can be read in light of Roth's overall commitment to a high-modernist notion of literary form and tradition. He argues that Roth's complete body of fiction demonstrates the continuing "vitality" of the "postwar romance and religion" (51) of "[o]ppositional high modernism" (50), as articulated by Leo and Murray in *I Married a Communist*. According to Posnock, Zuckerman accepts Leo's command to forfeit political and ethnic loyalties for the more transcendent calling of high literature. Zuckerman himself appears to signal as much in the novel. Following his introduction to the hallowed world of literary tradition by Leo, Zuckerman explains how: "my attachment to Ira – as to my mother, my father, my brother, even to the place where I'd grown up – was, I believed, thoroughly sundered" (221). However, this apparent confidence in his ability to discard the formative influences of his past for the greater cultural riches of literary history is critically re-evaluated by the now aged Zuckerman, who comes to see such youthful ambition as evidence of someone who was: "young and impudent and leaping with joy to discover all the intelligence tucked away

on this planet, he is apt to exaggerate the importance of the churning new reality and to deprecate as unimportant everything else" (221). Yet despite such qualifying remarks in the text, Posnock is keen to emphasise how Zuckerman's disavowal of Ira and O'Day marks the young aspiring writer's coming into awareness of the modernist-formalist separation – as already outlined to him by Leo – of the artist's work from any crude or positivist notions of social reality. He goes on to argue that this development in Zuckerman's artistic awareness is reflected by the manner in which political ideologies and ethnic loyalties give way in Roth's fiction to creative forms of literary invention and self-transformation.

The modernist-formalist urge to overcome the obstacles that social existence places in the path of autonomous literary creativity does indeed have a strong and guiding influence in Roth's fiction. However, I would suggest that this aesthetic principle is divided by certain less elevated and extra-literary matters that also come to demand Zuckerman's attention, both in *I Married a Communist* and elsewhere. As Zuckerman himself hints in explaining his reasons for living in isolation, it is not just "your manipulation of the world" as literary author, but also "its manhandling of you" that has shaped his life and writing up to this point. Zuckerman's divided sense of heritage between the politically charged literature that inspired him in adolescence and the high-literary or "paleface" tradition that he later discovers is made evident by his recollections of listening to Norman Corwin's *On a Note of Triumph* over the radio, following American victory in World War Two: "I wouldn't care to judge today if something I loved as much as I loved *On a Note of Triumph* was or was not art; it provided me with my first sense of the conjuring *power* of art" (38). Having shed himself of his adolescent illusions about the American "common man," Zuckerman is no longer buoyed by the sense in which "[y]ou flood into history and history floods into you" (39) that he first felt on listening to *On a Note of Triumph*. Yet he does not accede to Leo's more elitist distinction between "art" and mass cultural propaganda in assessing the "conjuring *power*" that is released by Corwin's "redskin" aesthetic. In this sense, I would argue, Zuckerman does not completely endorse the formalist mode of

aestheticism that informs both Murray and Leo's brands of literary scholarship. Instead, as my reading of previous novels has suggested, the ever multiplying and self-"conjuring" fictions that circulate what is known as 'real' constantly make difficult Zuckerman's efforts to manipulate the facts or reality into some type of well-wrought aesthetic form.

In contrast to both O'Day's rigorous notion of the 'real' and Leo's exalted idea of literature as existing beyond the concerns of quotidian reality, Zuckerman locates in Ira's emotionally charged and flawed use of Communist rhetoric aspects of the blurred distinctions between fact and fiction that have informed his own (and Roth's) development as a writer. As I have already mentioned, O'Day speaks in a language that entertains no sense of dissonance with his ideological notion of the world: "words shot through with will, nothing inflated, no wasted energy" (231). In Ira's rhetoric, by contrast, everything is "inflated" and coloured by an excess of emotional "energy." This is particularly evident in Ira's role as a ventriloquist whose imitations add a new level of meaning and creative intensity to the 'authentic' speech of others, least of all O'Day's. As the famous radio impersonator of Abraham Lincoln, Ira assumes a patchwork of various voices, distilling them into his own brand of agit-prop: "[the] union membership loved their stalwart autodidact's irresistible ventriloquism, his mishmash of Ringoldisms, O'Dayisms, Marxisms, and Lincolnisms" (45). The austere pretensions made by O'Day to an understanding of the historical 'real' find a level of artifice and distortion in Ira's ventriloquist style. As a result, O'Day sees Ira as a "phony" whose life as a New York radio star and marriage to famed actress Eve render him "[t]otally the creature of the bourgeoisie" (288). At one stage of the novel, Ira attempts to reconcile the contradictions between his "bourgeois" life as a public persona and his self-image as an average "working stiff" (50) by retreating to his shack in industrial Zinc Town. Yet Ira is ultimately unable to reconnect with his "first big immersion in brute life" (51) as a miner there. Instead, he merely manages to impersonate the life of someone who has to endure this rugged and regional existence of working class struggle. As Zuckerman highlights at various stages of the novel, the gross disparity between Ira's actual life as a

New York media star and the nostalgic attachment that he holds for his past situation as a struggling worker is clearly evidenced by his exaggerated style of political rhetoric: "Ira continued to speak of the record plant and the union meetings in the charismatic tone of his fellow workers, talked as though he still went off to work there every morning" (43).

Ira's considerable penchant for mimicry and ventriloquism infuriates O'Day, who claims that his great act of deception as a "traitor" to the Communist cause originated in the fact that he was: "[a]lways impersonating and never the real thing … [h]e throws off one disguise and becomes something else" (288). The relationship between impersonation and betrayal in O'Day's assessment of Ira's politics reflects certain key aspects of Roth's literary aesthetic. In contrast to O'Day's ascetic commitment to "the real thing" of historical necessity, Ira somewhat mimics the role of the class conscious worker in a way that finds resonance with the various forms of creative (self-) transformation that have characterised Zuckerman's embattled life as a writer and a man: "the uniforms you've worn and the costumes you've gotten into" (*I Married a Communist*, 72). Ira's pretensions to an authentic level of "workingman's argot" (37) – the speech of "someone rough and scarred by experience" (49) – are marked by obvious flaws for Zuckerman. Yet in many ways, the very sense of contradiction and emotional surfeit by which Ira "betrays" or exaggeratedly impersonates O'Day appeals greatly to Nathan. Recalling how he "loved when Ira repeated the lingo that rough union guys used among themselves" (42), Zuckerman suggests the extent to which he found in his friend's speech an early example of the heightened and emotional amplification of 'real' life that has characterised his own highly charged desire to transform the given facts into fiction.

In addition to the fascination that he shows for Ira's ventriloquist speech, the biting vitriol of Eve's daughter, Sylphid, provides Zuckerman with a pleasing example of how language can be used to heighten reality for comic purposes. Having been entertained by Sylphid's slanderous remarks about other guests while attending a party

at Eve and Ira's home as an adolescent, the aged Zuckerman reflects how: "I'd had no idea how very tame I was, how eager to please, until I saw how eager Sylphid was to antagonize, no idea how much freedom there was to enjoy once egoism unleashed itself from the restraint of social fear" (131). Zuckerman's reaction to Sylphid's performance contrasts starkly with Murray's sober and moralistic indictment of public gossip as a form of betrayal that develops from the "pleasure of dominating others, of destroying people who are your enemies" (262). Like Sylphid's speech, Zuckerman's fiction is itself motivated by a certain desire to "dominate others," in so much as he seeks to appropriate from and transform their actual lives for the purposes of his art. For example, the "caricatured detail" and "amused contempt" (131) evident in Sylphid's verbal display of disdain for guests at the party also calls to mind Henry's accusation in *The Counterlife* that his brother's use of other people's stories for his fiction involved certain mendacious forms of "[e]xaggeration, falsification, [and] rampant caricature" (235). As in the case of Ira, Sylphid's sardonic mode of embellishing 'real' life is infused by an emotional "egoism" that has "unleashed itself" from the sense of moral rectitude involved in the contrasting ideas of people like O'Day, Leo and Murray. From a reflective distance of many years, the aged Zuckerman thus locates in Ira and Sylphid's caricaturing acts of impersonation and lampoon evidence of the blurred boundaries between authenticity and artifice that will come to define his own writing.

Zuckerman's creative eagerness to absorb aspects of the bold egoism and raging desire evident in Sylphid and Ira's mimicry of 'real' life recalls remarks that Roth made earlier in his career concerning Rahv's notions of "paleface" and "redskin." In the self-interview that he published after writing *The Great American Novel*, Roth addresses a division in his work between the influence of "a salvationist literary ethos" (*Reading Myself and Others*, 71) derived from "New Critics sitting on their cans at Kenyon" (72) and a "redskin" predilection for "coarseness, recklessness, and vulgar, aggressive clowning" (75). This crude "redskin" sensibility was marked by a degree of hostility for what he calls the "heroic literary integrity" (72) that was assigned to "paleface" notions of literature in the early post-war period. Roth's fascination with the literary significance

of “the low-minded and their vulgarity” (74) finds evidence not just in Sylphid’s comic and rambunctious style of gossiping or in the depiction of Ira as an inflated caricature of the political revolutionary, but elsewhere throughout his fiction. For example, the young Kepesh’s love for the puerile and irreverent comic performances of Herbert Baratsky in *The Professor of Desire* are noted as an early source of creative interest that will be later nourished by more high-minded, yet equally absurdist, artists like Kafka. Similarly, young Philip in *The Plot against America* is enthralled by his cousin, Alvin’s stories of “man’s avarice, his zealousness, his unbounded vitality and staggering arrogance” (48), much to the moral disapproval of his parents. Roth’s ongoing fascination with the linguistic performance of “the aggressive, the crude, and the obscene” (*Reading Myself and Others*, 76) finds yet another comic example in Mickey Sabbath’s fondness for the dirty jokes told by a gas station owner in his otherwise decorous small-town of Madamaska Falls.

Roth explains in his essay how the “seemingly inimical realms” (76) of “paleface” and “redskin” are “reconciled” in his work in a manner that is “not in anyway necessarily congenial” to Rahv’s call for a synthesis between both conflicting styles:

> For what this “reconciliation” often comes down to is a feeling of being *fundamentally ill at ease in, and at odds with, both worlds*, although, one hopes, ill at ease with style, alert to the inexhaustible number of intriguing postures that the awkward may assume in public, and the strange means that the uneasy come upon to express themselves (77)

As I have already mentioned, Roth plays with Rahv’s coinage by using the term “redface” to describe the writer who “sympathizes equally with both parties in their disdain for the other and … re-enacts the argument in the body of his own work” (77). I have tried to show how Zuckerman’s literary development is characterised by this sense of an “awkward,” yet aesthetically enriching, conflict between Leo’s “paleface” formalism and a “redskin” fascination with the “crude” and “obscene” aspects of contemporary life. Unlike the earnest sensibility of Popular Front art, Zuckerman’s writing is engaged by an American ‘real’ which is increasingly contorted and amplified by the array of improbable fictions that it both produces and solicits. It is this particular

sense of “redskin” familiarity with a lower and discordant level of reality in Roth’s fiction that resists the formalist desire to redeem some elevated cultural understanding from the unremarkable and prosaic “facts” of life. Whereas John Crowe Ransom had discussed how the poet creates a crystalline “order of existence which in actual life is constantly crumbling beneath his touch,” the relationship between art and reality is somewhat more sullied for Roth. In his fiction, notions of authorial mastery and the well-wrought literary edifice are constantly undermined by the external demands of a more anarchic or “crumbling” experience of actuality.

I have alluded before to how Murray’s brand of dispassionate reasoning and high-literary scholarship is denuded of the more “visceral” aspects of Ira’s impassioned political engagement with the world. This “cool” level of disinterestedness is reflective of how the commitment to intellectual and literary high-culture among post-war liberal thinkers witnessed a relative disengagement from the material issues of American social life: a sort of distancing of culture and thought from the social body. As a result of the highly charged manner in which he has set out to transform the facts into fiction throughout his career, however, Zuckerman has been unable to gain a proper sense of emotional distance from the ‘real’ life matters about which he has sought to write. In other words, Zuckerman has been unable to achieve in his work a clear formalist line of separation between the literary and the non-literary, the fictional and the autobiographical. Unlike detached and disinterested figures such as Murray, Leo and Lonoff, writing fiction has involved for him an unrelenting erotic engagement of the authorial self with the coarse and unruly aspects of extra-literary existence. His “redface” approach to the “awkward” relationship between “crude” life and high-art, therefore, has made him far more present as a corporeal and erotically driven subject within his own fiction. Although he has attempted to overcome these fraught divisions in his life and art by withdrawing from the greater world beyond writing, the autobiographical reflections that are weaved through his story of Ira indicate the extent to which such long lasting personal conflicts remain of fresh interest to Zuckerman.

In the essay cited above, Roth elaborates upon his own social background as one among many "redskin[s]" in post-war America originating "from the semiliterate and semiassimilated reaches of urban Jewish society," whose engagement with the "paleface" domain of high-culture helped to produce the "miscegenation" of the "redface." (76) In earlier novels, as I have shown, Zuckerman's Jewish heritage provided a considerable source of conflict with his expressed desire to write fiction that transcends the specific boundaries of socio-historical experience and identity. However, the repeating cycle of departure from and return toward the site of origins in these works is something that has been somewhat quelled by his determination to escape such autobiographical conflicts in the American trilogy. Instead, the somewhat muted sense of desire and anguish involved in Zuckerman's efforts to overcome the limitations of his family background are transferred onto the plights of various Jewish characters in *I Married a Communist*, all of whom attempt to pass themselves off as deracinated subjects.

This particular Roth novel is populated by Jewish figures – Zuckerman, Murray, Ira, Eve and Leo – who all seek, in various ways, to associate themselves with a more expansive notion of cultural belonging, reaching far beyond their more localised and marginal ethnic beginnings. For example, Murray and Leo identify with a sacral notion of high-culture, which provides them with a means of transcending their particular social predicament as American Jews. Elsewhere, Ira seeks to identify himself with the suffering masses of the world through the universalising language of his "common man" ideology. However, the uncontrollable rage that shatters Ira's "civilizing path" of political idealism is traced back somewhat to his status as a self-divided Jew. As one whose aggressive temperament was partially conditioned by his marginal experience as a Jewish boy growing up in the Italian section of Newark, there are various moments in Roth's novel where Ira reacts violently to incidents of anti-Semitism. Not least of these occurs during World War Two, when Ira dispenses a brutal and near fatal beating to a fellow army private who calls him a "kike" (99). His inability to overcome the injurious experience of ethnic marginality suggests a sense of the shared trauma by which Ira and

Zuckerman have been unable to emulate the self-coherent form of identity that characters like O'Day and Leo appear to embody. Zuckerman even suggests, at one stage, that the undivided attention given to the revolutionary cause of the worker by O'Day may well result from his status as a non-Jew:

> Because he wasn't a Jew? Because he was a goy? Because, as Ira told me, O'Day had been raised in a Catholic orphanage? Was that why he could be so thoroughly, so ruthlessly, so visibly living nothing but the bare, bare bones? (236)

O'Day's social background as not only a "goy," but as an orphan also, has freed him from the turbulent self-divisions caused by Zuckerman's conflicts with his Jewish father. The clinical sense of self-cohesion attributed here to O'Day's non-Jewish heritage finds further evidence in Eve's determined act of disguising herself as a Gentile. Changing her name from Eva Fromkin to Eve Frame, she hides her ethnic background so as to reinvent herself as a Hollywood movie star. However, the Jewish origins that have been erased by Eve's act of impersonation find a form of uncanny return in her anti-Semitic outbursts, particularly as they are directed at Doris. Seeing in Doris a traumatic reminder of the abject Jewish self that she has sought to abandon, Eve subjects her to a particularly harsh tirade of abuse at one stage of the novel. As Murray explains to Zuckerman, Eve's disgust with Doris was a classic expression of "that aversion she had for the Jew who was insufficiently disguised" (53). Although an extreme case, Eve is thus part of a broader phenomenon of Jewish characters who attempt to overcome the trauma of their marginalised cultural origins in *I Married a Communist*. Such individual examples find a deep resonance with Zuckerman as someone who has been left scarred by the conflicts of allegiance between his Jewish upbringing and the wider cultural influences to which he has been exposed in later life. Like Ira and, to a certain extent, Eve, Zuckerman has been left painfully divided by the fact that he has been unable to achieve in his fiction any lasting form of disguise or self-reinvention by which he might fully abandon his conflicted sense of ethnic origins.

Zuckerman explains in *I Married a Communist* how his breaking ranks with the

cultural confines of Jewish family life involved the search for a replacement father or origin; what he calls "this genealogy that isn't genetic" (217). He refers to influential figures such as Ira, Leo and O'Day as "surrogate father[s]" to whom he had made himself "eminently adoptable" (106) at different stages of his development from adolescence into manhood. However, each of these "surrogate" figures was also to become subject to his disavowal. He describes "the men to whom I apprenticed myself, from Paine and Fast and Corwin to Murray and Ira and beyond" as "the adopted parents who also, each in his turn, had to be cast off along with their legacy" (217). As a result of these repeated acts of figural patricide, Zuckerman has been cut loose from the cultural and narrative authority of his various "fathers" and entered into "the orphanhood that is total, which is manhood" (217). It is this experience of "orphanhood" that defines Zuckerman's maturation not only into "manhood," but as a writer also. As an orphan, he is no longer fathered or authored by any pre-existing origin, but instead inhabits (and is inhabited by) an ensemble of conflicting voices, each of which permeates and undermines the others' sense of authority. Zuckerman elaborates upon the stylistic effect that this receptive attitude to a multitude of different exterior influences has had on his writing. Describing himself as "merely an ear in search of a word," he suggests that "the book of my life is a book of voices" (222). The varying and conflicting styles that constitute this "one long speech that I've been listening to" illustrate its lack of any fixed authorial centre:

> The rhetoric is sometimes original, sometimes pleasurable, sometimes pasteboard crap (the speech of the incognito), sometimes maniacal, sometimes matter-of-fact, and sometimes like the sharp prick of a needle, and I have been hearing it for as long as I can remember: how to think, how not to think; how to behave, how not to behave … what is rapturous, what is murderous, what is laudable, what is shallow, what is sinister, what is shit, and how to remain pure in soul (222)

This passage works as a useful typology of Roth's polyphonic or dialogic range. It suggests the manner in which Zuckerman both inscribes and loans a certain authority to various external voices (as exemplified by Leo and O'Day's contrasting dictates about "how to remain pure in soul"), while at the same time seeking to subsume such outside influences under the control of his own authorial imagination.

I would argue, therefore, that the above cited passage demonstrates a typical Rothian sense of dialogical struggle between externally intruding voices and the internal workings of the literary imagination. However, it is feasible that such a moment in the text might also be used to support the arguments of those scholars who have located in Roth's writing a certain development toward a postmodern aesthetic. Patrick O'Donnell, for example, discusses what he sees are the important connection between the figure of the father and the postmodern strain in Roth's writing. In his reading of *My Life as a Man*, he describes how Roth's fiction is a testament to "the notion that the self as the 'subject of writing' is multiple and unauthorised, lacking a 'real' father who will provide the proper evidence regarding the origins and validity of the self" (153). In *I Married a Communist*, Zuckerman's various acts of filial defiance toward his various fathers could be construed in similar terms as having cut him and his art completely loose from any authoring sense of a referent or origin. However, in contrast with this wholly de-centred viewpoint, I would argue that the many paternal influences which Zuckerman has "cast off" continue to exact a certain residual authority over his fiction. By explaining that "I have greatly refashioned my attachments through the effort of testing them," Roth has reminded us how those aspects of the 'real' or origin which his fiction is set in opposition to are also, strangely, the invaluable source of antagonism or "irritant" that releases his creative energies. Despite the aged Zuckerman's pretensions toward emulating Lonoff, he is not an isolate aesthete who creates at some heightened remove from the influence of greater social forces and cultural authorities which brush against and threaten to impede his position as the redoubtable author. Rather, his fiction relies upon a necessary tension with those various external voices that are telling him "how to think, how not to think; how to behave, how not to behave." In one sense, the various moments of rupture that he experiences between himself and the many figures that have influenced and guided him in the past afford Zuckerman the creative freedom of becoming his own author. At the same time, such moments of sundering with those who have 'fathered' him also perform as unfinished acts of traumatic departure, which he is forced to repeatedly re-visit and make sense of in his fiction. In this way, Roth is not

endorsing some postmodern notion of a complete break from an origin or referent, in which the self and reality are open to the limitless play of textual reinvention. Instead, he is more interested in exploring the productive tensions fostered by a troubled experience of origins that never attain absolute authority over him, and yet which cannot be completely discarded by Zuckerman in his determination to become his own author.

Much like in *The Ghost Writer*, the liberating act of filial rejection that symbolically ushers Zuckerman into the world of ideas, language and literature beyond his familial surroundings is attended by a contrasting sense of guilt and loss in *I Married a Communist*. Referring again to the various "paternal surrogate[s]" to whom he "apprenticed" himself, Zuckerman explains how "by taking instruction from these men, I seemed to … be selling my father short" (106). The break with his father is described by him as his first of many acts of "betrayal" (106), instigating his fall from a coherent notion of origin and home into the corruptive experience of "error" that has defined both his and Murray's adult lives: "all my mistakes in life had flowed from that precipitate departure of mine" (107). In a sense, Zuckerman indicates here how his first significant transgression of paternal authority involved a trauma that he has continued to rehearse and repeat later in life. The painfully self-dividing effects of his erotic desire for authorial (self-) mastery, which Zuckerman has attempted to "keep at bay" in *I Married a Communist*, have effectively stemmed from these many "betrayals" and "mistakes." Yet such anguished experiences of pain and loss (impotence) are also described by him as necessary for his development into the virile potency of manhood and fiction writing: "[i]f it weren't for my mistakes I'd still be at home sitting on the front stoop" (107). Unlike Brownie, the simple and hard working shop assistant that he meets in Zinc Town as a young man, Zuckerman is unwilling and unable "to play only the role of himself" (207). By rejecting his various paternal figures, he has dismissed any possibility that he might achieve the seamless connection with an original or 'authentic' sense of self that Brownie appears to enjoy:

He wanted life to repeat and repeat itself, and I wanted to break out … What would it be like to have that

passion to break out vanish from my life? What must it be like to be Brownie? (207)

This "passion to break out" underlines the link between erotic longing and the Zuckerman's interest in reinventing life through fiction. Yet such a self-liberating concept of desire and writing as a means of overcoming notions of the father, origin or 'real' contains a thanatological experience of unfulfilled yearning in so much as Zuckerman is never able to find his home or a suitable "role" for himself elsewhere. Instead, as a result of his inexorable longing to revise notions of the self and reality through fiction, he has become, like Ira, a "man perpetually hungering after his life."

Zuckerman's stoical effort to "disrobe" from his endless variation of fictional "costumes" in *I Married a Communist* marks an attempt to renounce his desire for self-reinvention and embrace, like Brownie, the imperative "to play only the role of himself." Yet unlike Lonoff, he is unable to restore any original or coherent sense of himself by abandoning all claims to corporeal desire and becoming the ghost-like and detached writer. His story of the life of Ira is highly coloured by autobiographical reminiscences that suggest Zuckerman's continued narrative appetite to re-explore his fractured sense of origins as a man and writer. In this fashion, he remains physically present as a desiring narrative subject/author in the text. I have already indicated certain ways in which Zuckerman's emotional relationship as a writer to the wider world existing beyond fiction shares parallels with Ira's "overheated" political ambitions to transform the historical conditions of the American working class. Ira's many bitter disappointments arise out of the fact that his grasp over the actual material forces driving American history only ever comes in the form of second hand impersonations and "never [as] the real thing." As a result of this frustrating lack of knowledge of what is 'real' in terms of socio-economic relations and class experience in America, Ira is unable to gain a sense of control over or impose a particular leftist political vision upon his historical moment. Similarly, Zuckerman has been scarred by his many battles as an author to comprehend and gain some controlled measure of an increasingly unwieldy sense of American reality. This searing conflict with 'real' life marks a considerable

fracturing of “the excited feelings of community” (39) and the distinctly palpable sense of American history that the adolescent Zuckerman had experienced through Ira and “redskin” political culture. Yet despite the anguishing experiences of disillusionment and “betrayal” that are involved in Zuckerman’s growing realisation that the progressive vision of American life which he finds embodied in Ira is not quite ‘real’ or sustainable, he also begins to derive from such an experience a keen awareness of how fiction does not have to satisfy some political or epistemological notion of fidelity to the “facts.” Questions of betrayal or feigned authenticity run straight to the heart of the contradictions and emotional conflicts which eventually tear Ira’s life apart. While such problems are mirrored in Zuckerman’s life, they are also central to the erotic mode of impersonating or falsifying “reality” that characterises his art.

As I have argued, Murray’s story pretends toward a far more measured and dispassionate reflection of events than is evidenced by Zuckerman’s insights into the personal conflicts and emotional disarray that has characterised his experience of post-war American life. Murray’s brand of “critical thinking” and moral deduction is reflective of post-war liberal efforts to understand American social reality in certain disinterested intellectual and literary terms. However, as his delayed expressions of anguish and guilt over events suggest, he is no more able than Zuckerman to gain a perspective of heightened remove from the personal experiences that have marked his involvement with American history. As Zuckerman points out, Murray’s deep lying emotional investment in particular traumatic events within his narrative reveals a certain betrayal of his impersonal or disembodied values of intellectual reasoning and high-literary formalism. In this way, Roth’s novel calls into question the philosophical and, in particular, literary assumptions of post-war liberal scholars like Trilling and Rahv. For Roth, Trilling’s “moral realism” and Rahv’s concept of “synthesis” between “redskin” and “paleface” styles are representative of the all too neat literary models for examining American historical experience that were fashioned by anti-Stalinist liberal critics after the war. By contrast, his self-divided and emotionally charged form of “redface” literature is born of what he sees as the turbulent interaction between the greater world

of external "facts" and the inner machinations of the private authorial imagination in post-war American life. In recalling his early enthusiasm for the "enchantment" of writers like Corwin, Zuckerman describes the triumphant and overpowering sense in which "redskin" culture seemed to suggest a harmony between national life and the private existence of the individual citizen: "[y]ou flood into America and America floods into you" (39). As I have suggested, neither he nor Murray offer any validation for this style of Popular Front culture. Yet whereas Murray has sought to stake out an absolute distance between Ira's leftist thinking and his own political and literary ideas, Zuckerman has continued to examine the peculiar and antagonising ways in which the world of 'real' social events and circumstances "floods into" both his writing and personal life.

In considerable contrast to my own argument, Anthony Hutchinson's reading of *I Married a Communist* suggests that Roth's sympathies lie clearly with the "chastened liberalism" (110) of Murray. Much like others who I have earlier mentioned, Hutchinson contends that it is "Murray Ringold whose influence seems the most profound" (108) in the text. He explains that this is due to the "lasting effect" (108) of Murray's pedagogical influence on Zuckerman, even after other inspirational figures like Leo, O'Day and Ira outlive their usefulness as his mentors. In particular, Hutchinson stresses that the older man's advice to Zuckerman "about the repercussions of effective withdrawal from human society" (108) places into sharp relief Murray's own continued efforts to make political and moral sense of the historical period through which both of them have lived. However, Hutchinson fails to fully explore the origins of Zuckerman's ascetic renunciation of the greater social world, either as they are explored in *I Married a Communist* or made evident in earlier Roth novels. In addition, he in no way registers the stark ambivalences of this form of "effective withdrawal." As I have discussed at repeated stages throughout this chapter, Zuckerman's keen, yet troubled, engagement with broader issues of history and the self is still palpably discernible in a text where he claims to have abandoned such an anguishing preoccupation. Hutchinson's refusal to examine deeper into Zuckerman's conflicted role as both autobiographical subject and

self-effacing author in *I Married a Communist* is blind, I would suggest, to the manner in which Nathan judges the disinterested notions of intellectualism and literature upon which Murray's Trillingesque brand of liberalism is based.

"The disruption of the anticipated American future": the Sixties and the Shattering End of the Age of Liberal Consensus in *American Pastoral*[20]

In this chapter, I aim to discuss the manner in which *American Pastoral* re-explores the fraught divisions in American life that arose from the radical outbursts of political protest and social unrest in the 1960s. As Roth's narrator, Zuckerman, succinctly puts it, by way of explaining the broader historical focus for the story of Seymour "the Swede" Levov that he reconstructs: "I am thinking of the sixties and of the disorder occasioned by the Vietnam War" (88). Throughout the novel, the political and cultural rebellions of the sixties are depicted as a "disorder" that has been inflicted upon a more serene and "pastoral" experience of early post-war America. Significant to this treatment of the sixties as affecting a violent and horrific discontinuity with a more harmonious era is how it might inform any political attitude within Roth's text toward the New Left and counterculture that emerged during this period. As an important context to my reading of this novel, I will outline how the cultural and social battles of this turbulent era have been replayed and made serviceable by both the Right and its left-liberal opponents in contemporary American politics. As Peter Collier and David Horowitz have remarked, "the Sixties is still the undead decade" in American public life: "[f]ar from being yesterday's news, as it should be, it is still the white sound of our intellectual life, decanting its poisonous old wine into new bottles, fomenting our culture wars, and picking the scabs off the angry social wounds that have been with us now for a generation" (1).

As my brief historical outline will suggest, such ongoing divisions in America can be understood in light of how the sixties brought about a major breakdown in the political, economic and cultural values of what has been termed the age of "liberal consensus." The pragmatic compromises that concepts of a "vital center" or "end of ideology" brought to American liberalism found expression through the notion of a viable national consensus of aims and values among different political, social and

[20] Quotation taken from *American Pastoral*, page 85.

cultural groups in the post-war period. This atmosphere of accord was grounded by an overriding liberal faith in the mutually beneficial co-existence of established New Deal structures with the rapid expansion of American capitalism following the war. In a period that saw an unparalleled spread of prosperity among American citizens, problems of scarcity began to be considered as either already solved or gradually solvable by what had become largely considered as a well balanced economic and political system: a harmonious blend of progressive approaches to collective welfare with the more acquisitive and individualistic values of capitalism. Operating upon what Paul Lyons refers to as "the assumption … that economic matters had been resolved" (5), this climate of liberal compromise heralded a glorious form of democratic capitalism that appeared to have the liberating potential to meet the material needs of all citizens. As Lyons states, this brief age of consensus was built upon a determined faith in:

> the uniquely liberating and democratizing qualities of U.S. capitalism … [which,] through its productive capacity, makes radical challenges moot, with harmony, or at least countervailing interests, built upon a widening, thickening American middle (33)

The palpable evidence for a rapidly "thickening American middle" during this period helped to foster a heightened sense of national unity and self-belief. America's fluid system of democratic capitalism appeared to inaugurate a sort of "common man" paradise, the fruits of which the whole nation could collectively partake in and rejoice over. For example, Roland Marchand argues that, as "[c]lass barrier … seemed to disappear" within the "snowballing trend toward economic democratization and a classless culture" in this period, there developed a sense in which "disparate groups and values seemed to fuse into a composite national culture" (143). Similarly, Todd Gitlin argues that "a new basis for national unity" was derived from the post-war surge in affluence among the American masses: "[f]or the majority, any class resentment yielded to gratitude for a system that delivered goods, or enough of the goods to warrant the gratitude" (1995, 65). Upholding the Rooseveltian spirit of the New Deal, the economic and social benefits of consensus were thus inextricably tied to notions of a harmonious cultural commonwealth shared among America's diverse, and often previously divided,

groups of people and interests. Yet as I will discuss below in more detail, events of the sixties uncovered the many tensions and contradictions that lurked within this somewhat idealised notion of an American people who were united by commonly held experiences, values and aspirations.

This chapter will discuss the manner in which *American Pastoral* treats the various conflicts of the sixties in terms of an "undead" experience of rupture or trauma within American public consciousness, the divisive effects of which are continually re-visited within contemporary political and cultural life. Specifically, Roth explores the radical upheavals of the period in terms of the paradoxical structure of an unhealed trauma in the lives of both the novel's narrator, Nathan Zuckerman, and its protagonist, the Swede. In what I will later discuss as its "quasi-direct" manipulation of narrative perspective and tone, Roth presents a nostalgic view of the early post-war period in America as a time of innocence, before the divisive events of the sixties began to unfold. Although not to be confused as a viewpoint to which the novelist himself (or his dialogically inscribed narrator, for that matter) fundamentally adheres, this pre-sixties moment is presented in mythic terms as having promised a new American Eden for the early lives of both the Swede and Zuckerman in *American Pastoral*. Describing it as "the greatest moment of collective inebriation in American history" (40) Zuckerman evokes the overriding spirit of cultural unity and unencumbered social progress that came to define the immediate post-war period. The apparent lack of contradictions or obstacles in this purposeful march of national history is embodied most fully in the figure of the Swede in Roth's novel. Unburdened by any notion of self-division or historical constraint, the Swede represents the American Adam whose life of unbounded achievement and joy is nourished by a sense of idyllic harmony between the various economic, cultural and familial aspects of his existence.

It is against this utopian vision of America as a site of pastoral fulfilment and tranquillity that various forms of New Left and countercultural rebellion are introduced as shocking and inassimilable experiences of trauma by Roth. This sense of traumatic

rupture is crystallised by the explosive impact of his daughter, Merry's act of political terrorism on the life of the Swede. As a militant sixties' dissident who rails against the injustices of national political and cultural life, Merry interrupts the "upward, unbroken trajectory" (122) of her family's steady ascent, over three generations, to the epic heights of American success. She refuses to play the role of the happy "child for whom America was to be heaven itself" (122), thereby dismantling the Swede's ordered notion of his place within the providential design of American life. By contrast, she introduces her father to "the fury, the violence, and the desperation of … the indigenous American berserk" (86), which defies the static unities and sense of unhindered progress within his pastoral world: "[h]e took the kid out of real time and she put him right back in" (68). As I will examine in greater detail below, the sudden disruption that his daughter's political terrorism brings to the Swede's life of pastoral contentment and success takes the form of an unregistered trauma that he can neither fully own nor abandon. Merry's bomb acts as the inerasable – yet un-inscribable at the same time – event which fractures his cohesive idea of self and place. Throughout the novel, the Swede is shown to suffer displacement from his secure and predictable idea of life by the sudden impact of moments of traumatic recall. The self-divisive effect of these horrific memories is contrasted with his nostalgia for a life of pastoral unity and bliss, as experienced by him prior to Merry's radical disaffection from the world of family and home. No matter how hard he tries to keep intact or wilfully restore his coherent sense of life in which "[e]verything always added up to something whole" (191), the Swede is ultimately faced by the realisation that "[h]e could never root out the unexpected thing" (176); the unpredictable and disjunctive incidence of the repeating traumatic event that, like Merry's bomb itself, blows apart his idyllic sense of oneness.

Aftershock: the Continuing Fallout of the Sixties in American Political and Cultural Life

The ethos of liberal consensus that prevailed in most aspects of American political and cultural life after the war was teeming with many tensions and contradictions, which would begin to unravel and eventually become exposed during the

internecine conflicts of the sixties. One important inconsistency within this discourse is that which exists between its countervailing movements toward open-endedness and closure; debate and compromise; difference and homogeneity. Despite their disavowal of Marxist ideas, the broader coterie of liberal intellectuals who supported the post-war consensus still held to a steady notion of rational progress that pre-figured an end to class strife by means of an efficiently organised and virulent American capitalism. In this way, the "end of ideology" philosophy that was widely shared among liberals in this period sought to disarm what it considered the utopian idea of social levelling involved in militant class politics, while at the same time envisioning an alternative "end" to the socio-economic conflicts that had inspired the liberal fascination with Marxism during the Depression. Deep tensions existed between this progressive trajectory within consensus liberalism and its overriding sense of pragmatic and anti-utopian compromise with existing socio-economic conditions. In particular, certain notions about the highly complex condition of human existence that liberal intellectuals set in opposition to the lifeless machinations of ideology appeared to be undermined by the mass cultural ramifications of prosperity in post-war America. For example, in "Art and Fortune," Lionel Trilling voices concerns with what he sees as a prevailing "ideal of security" in post-war society, by which "the conflict of capital and labour is at present a contest for the possession of the goods of a single way of life, and not a cultural struggle" (261). Trilling expresses here an anxiety over how increased mass prosperity is giving rise to the stifling and static form of "a single way of life" in post-war America, thereby flattening out the sense of "culture [a]s nothing if not a dialectic" that underpins his political and cultural idea of "moral realism."

Such concern with cultural homogeneity and conformity – usually ascribed to totalitarian regimes by post-war liberal intellectuals – epitomises a fundamental contradiction within liberalism in this period. As I have suggested in my previous chapter, the impulse among post-war liberals for locating certain contradictions and conflicts within human experience was somewhat restricted by their unwillingness to countenance particular forms of political and economic antagonism, for danger that they

might be associated with extremist ideological viewpoints existing outside of the "vital center" of American liberalism. In this sense, consensus liberalism evoked an idea of pluralistic conflict and open-ended debate that was heavily circumscribed by the centrist notion of compromise that it endorsed. In particular, the "end of ideology" sensibility foreclosed any serious discussions on class and other potentially divisive social issues like race and gender by declaring them disruptive to the socio-economic and cultural achievements of the liberal consensus. The marginalising of such forms of social division and grievance from within the liberal consensus ideal, therefore, merely helped to foster a growing sense of cultural homogeneity and repressive conformity in post-war American life, which found biting criticism in works such as David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* and William Whyte's *The Organization Man*.[21]

The New Left radicals of the sixties sought to reject what they saw as the various flaws and restrictions of consensus. At first, they did so in the name of a more idealistic and impatient form of progressive liberalism, as spelled out by the appeal for a "participatory democracy" in the Students for a Democratic Society's "Port Huron Statement." Paul Lyons, for instance, has remarked how: "[t]he New Left had been built, despite its ambivalences, on traditional liberal, Democratic visions of 'the people' against 'the interests'" (70). However, this initial growth of idealism was to radicalise further into a utopian and apocalyptic politics of militant revolution among many within

[21] The room afforded for this historical outline in my argument does not allow for a detailed discussion of these works. However, they are suitably introduced and studied in the following monographs: *The Twilight of the Middle Class* by Andrew Hoborek; *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age* by Richard Pells; *Dr. Strangelove's America* by Margot Henriksen. In particular, Hoborek provides an interesting example of how anxieties about conformity and cultural uniformity in the 1950s can be read in relation to the largely ignored experience of class in this period. Reading works by Riesman, Mills and others, Hoborek discusses how these sociological tracts have been viewed in terms of their shared "existential narrative of conflict between the individual and society" (11). He wishes to argue, however, that the "existential" dilemma outlined by such works can be read in terms of a "discourse of constrained agency [that] is best understood as a product of the transition from small-property ownership to white-collar employment as the basis of middle-class status" (8) during this period. In arguing thus, Hoborek marks out the significant material changes underlying the language of anxiety and conformity in the post-war era. According to him, such widespread unease and uncertainty about the material and cultural benefits which seemed to accrue during the age of consensus tells the story of: "the middle class's loss of its historical control over property, which in a capitalist economy rendered it vulnerable *as a class* to future losses of income and security" (9).

the youth movement, as the decade grew and the Vietnam War escalated. According to certain critics, this turn toward "near-millenial expectations" (Isserman and Kazin, 349) within the New Left witnessed the complete abandonment of a more mature tradition of intellectual thought and pragmatic progressivism, associated with the Rooseveltian values of the liberal consensus. Paul Berman has described this shift in radical intentions during the sixties as the "SDS's backsliding into left-wing authoritarianism" (78). Equally, Lyons stresses "that by the late 1960s, the movements of the Left had turned away from liberal ameliorative reforms and embraced a fully utopian set of visions" (206). In many regards, the New Left mobilised the kind of ideological rhetoric that had earlier been rejected by the New York Intellectuals. Some commentators have been keen to describe how such radical positions evoked distinctly individualist and emotive styles of libertarianism that often ran contradictory to their overall left-wing and collectivist visions. These militant strands of the New Left are thus often seen as sharing in the same pathology as Bell's "chiliast," in so much as their members are viewed as highly impassioned individuals whose extremist ideologies have distanced them greatly from the wider public whom they putatively claim to serve. As part of this overall criticism, the utopian factions of the New Left have also been charged with a flagrant lack of appreciation for the values of collective organisation and rational praxis that had sustained progressive politics prior to the sixties. George Packer, to cite one example, has argued that for the dissident youth of the period:

> Reason itself became the enemy. Reason strangled feeling, gave oppression cover, blighted the natural goodness of youth. And the political expression of reason, modern liberalism's use of government in the shaping of national life, was discredited. It had led directly, inevitably, to the war in Vietnam (232)

In similar fashion, Isserman and Kazin have explained that, while "earlier generations of radicals had derided capitalism as an anarchic, irrational system," the New Left "radicals scorned the system because it was *too* rational, based on a soul-destroying set of technological and bureaucratic imperatives that stifled individual expression" (351).

The critics that I have cited in the previous paragraph tend to excoriate the New Left for rejecting the gradualist approach within modern American liberalism and adhering to impossible revolutionary fantasies which lacked any practical means of implementation. Such judgments are typical of a more traditionalist type of left-liberal critique that shares in Irving Howe's original indictment of the New Left. According to the dismayed Howe, the radicals of the sixties merely managed to develop "extreme postures" and an overall "style" of "moral rectitude," which desperately failed to culminate in "a politics of common action" ("New Styles in Leftism," 43-45). In a similar vein to Howe, Richard Rorty despairs over how the sixties "saw the beginning of the end of a tradition of leftist reformism which dated back to the Progressive Era" (1998, 55). In his argument, Rorty extols the older virtues of "the Deweyan, pragmatic, participatory Left" over the impractical and destructive fantasies of "the spectatorial Left which has taken its place" (1998, 38).[22] Paul Lyons also argues that the New Left's attacks on the notion of "system" or "establishment" meant that it "failed abysmally in becoming a credible, institutional force" (219). For Howe, Lyons, Rorty and others, the New Left has provided a serious challenge to the very legitimacy of the political methods by which liberalism had achieved systematic economic and institutional change prior to the sixties. As George Packer, reflecting on events in this period, states: "[l]iberalism, the impulse that ran through American politics from the years of reform in the 1890s and the New Deal to the Great Society of the mid-1960s, had crashed in flames" (256). Although the commentators that I have drawn upon tend to acknowledge the "finally unsuccessful compromises of the postwar years" (Lyons, 16), they see in the Rooseveltian example a usable tradition of left-liberal politics that contrasts favourably with the New Left's failure to reconstruct any viably alternative model of social and economic reform.

[22] Rorty uses this term "spectatorial Left" to explain the legacy of the sixties on left-liberal politics in America. It describes, according to him, a form of left wing politics that abstracts itself into absolutist moral or ideological visions, which refuse to find compromise with the more complex and pragmatic requirements of day to day political engagement.

The radical opposition to orthodoxy – particularly in relation to race, gender and sexual orientation – among the New Left and counterculture has been credited by many with helping to dismantle any pre-existing notions of a monolithic American culture. In this regard, the sixties has been deemed by many as paving the way for the markedly greater acceptance of diverse and marginal experiences within American public life that has found expression in contemporary forms of identity politics and political correctness. Yet while the more diverse and fragmented view of cultural experience nurtured by post-sixties' identity politics may be lauded as radical and liberating by some, it has also been accused of weakening the sense of national togetherness upon which older liberal values of common progress were predicated. Various left-liberal critics have railed against the limited sense of empowerment and liberation that has recently been granted to disparate and localised notions of cultural belonging within America by the still active remnants of the New Left. In particular, these commentators argue that this New Left-style politics of cultural identity fails to address the socio-economic conditions that have shaped the experiences of inequality and marginality for many disenfranchised groups in America. According to such arguments, the fundamental structures of material wealth and re-distribution within American society require practical institutional reform, the kind of which has been discredited by the anti-establishment rhetoric of sixties' radicals. Tracing its origins back to the New Left's "spectatorial" mode of utopian abstraction and disengagement from complex socio-material politics, Rorty has stated that in the exclusively cultural domain of identity politics:

> The concern to do what the Sixties called 'naming the system' takes precedence over reforming the laws … the cultural Left does not think much about what the alternatives to a market economy might be, or about how to combine political freedom with centralized economic decision making (1998, 79)

Echoing this view, Isserman and Kazin have argued that the "important victory" through which "[r]adicals and liberals … transformed the public language and imagery of race" in the sixties has been made hollow by a "puzzled, if not indifferent silence" (355) toward the relationship between class and racial disadvantage. They argue that, precisely

as a result of the lessening in publicly sanctioned racism since the sixties, "racial inequality has become primarily a question of access to wealth and secure employment" (355) rather than being based exclusively upon cultural prejudice. According to this more traditionalist left-liberal viewpoint, what Rorty calls the "cultural Left" adds to the New Left's original attack on the Rooseveltian model of social progress by the manner in which it "denies a shared politics, a belief in a potentially common, American interest" (Lyons, 133). Lyons argues that the quietude within identity politics toward more overreaching, cross-sectional issues of poverty and institutional disenfranchisement "insure[s] that the truly disadvantaged will remain marginalized" (121). Todd Gitlin has made a similar claim. He lambastes the cultural Left for the manner in which it contributes to the "exhaustion of that core belief shared by Americanism and by the historic ideals of the Left: a belief in progress through the unfolding of a humanity present – at least potentially – in every human being" (1995, 85). For Gitlin, identity politics involves a postmodern ghettoising of cultural differences, against which the "claim to progress through [a common cultural] understanding is billed as the instrument of white, Western, male domination" (85).

The liberal consensus model that was fractured by the radical politics of the sixties found itself vulnerable to a further point of attack from the birth of a New Right in the same period. While it found a significant point of attack in denouncing what it saw as the social irresponsibility and moral laxities of the New Left and counterculture, this new conservatism shared with radical sixties' dissidents a sense of impatience with the post-war politics of consensus. The brand of political conservatism that emerged out of the sixties sought to dismantle the liberal approaches to government, economy and society which had prevailed in America since Roosevelt. The New Right were to advocate a free market libertarianism that expresses disdain for what it deems to be unnecessary and meddlesome government intervention in the socio-economic relations between American citizens. As Michael Thompson suggests, this new conservative turn in American politics marked a "return to the basic doctrines of the 'old liberalism'" that existed prior to the rise of progressive thinking and the implementation of the New Deal:

"to the emphasis on individual autonomy, a hostility to the state, and the reordering of social life enshrining the market mechanism as the institutional and ethical manifestation of human liberty" (16). Believing in the inherently fair and self-remedial structures of capitalism, such a *laissez-faire* approach to economic affairs opposed the Rooseveltian liberal promise of a balanced market system that would ensure a degree of material security for all American citizens. Lyons explains how the turbulence caused by the sixties witnessed a moment of opportunity for this right-wing ideology:

> When the liberal consensus fell apart … there was room for a conservative resurgence. The New Right could now engage in its own assault on the welfare state in the belief that free markets and competition would open up greater areas for human liberty (71)

As a result of their shared attack upon consensus politics, some commentators have suggested that the New Left assault on what it came to see as the stifling and irredeemably corrupt post-war "system" or "establishment" lent itself to attacks made by a re-invigorated Right against the tenets of modern American liberalism. For example, while Isserman and Kazin have emphasised that "New Leftists succeeded in exposing the bankrupt policies of the liberal state," they also point out how "that very success activated right-wing critics of liberalism who championed a 'counterculture' of their own" (357). Elsewhere, Lyons has argued that, "[d]espite their enormous differences, both New Left and New Right movements sharpened the contradiction between individual and group" in their contrasting visions of an ideal American society based upon unfettered individualism, begging the question: "how does doing your own thing differ from a free-market, laissez-faire individualism?" (16-17). In similar fashion, Rebecca Klatch argues that "an affinity for values such as individual freedom, the impulse against bureaucracy and big government, the question of centralized authority, and the embrace of decentralization and local control are common to both left and right" (9), as they became re-defined in the sixties.

Although sharing a similar disdain for "corporate liberalism" (Lyons, 5), the New Right and the New Left that emerged from the sixties have since become engaged

in ideologically toned battles over issues of American cultural identity and tradition. By viewing the sixties in catastrophic terms as a period of turbulent social upheaval and moral disarray, the New Right appeals to a sentimentalised view of cultural innocence and civic cohesion that, it believes, existed in America prior to this divisive decade. Eric Foner has pointed out that "[a]s the country turned more conservative [in succeeding years], the sixties came to be blamed for every ill, real and imagined, of American society, from crime, drug abuse, and teenage pregnancy to a decline of respect for authority" (305). Collier and Horowitz, two repentant former radicals from the sixties who became neoconservative ideologues, argue that the New Left's "utopian fantasy of 'social justice' … had laid siege to the values, institutions, styles and traditions that had made up the natural order of things in America for their parents and their parents' parents" (3). It is this persisting sense of horror with the radical cultural changes effected by the sixties that shapes the Right's idealisation of certain conservative notions of social authority and moral orthodoxy within contemporary America. Such a distinctly cultural outlook has had far-reaching political usages in helping to strengthen the Right's attack upon what it sees as the gross failures of Rooseveltian liberalism. Discussing the triumph of Reaganism in the '80s, Isserman and Kazin have mentioned how: "the conservative victors found it politically convenient to lump together the vestiges of New Deal-Great Society liberalism with the memory of the New Left to justify reversing both the social legislation and the 'moral permissiveness' associated with the sixties" (353). Similarly, Lyons has stressed how the right sees the liberal welfare state as having "created and expanded the underclass," which has, in turn, "paid the heaviest price" for the "cultural climate of hedonism and irresponsibility" created by "the radical and countercultural assaults on traditional values" (Lyons, 116). According to George Packer, right-wing ideologues believe that Roosevelt's welfare model for "government has destroyed true community in the name of a forced community of taxation and entitlement" (372). He argues that the New Right's insistence upon the economic and cultural benefits of notions of individual self-help and private moral conscience has helped "to reject the main insight of twentieth century American politics, that the federal

government must intervene to alleviate suffering where people can't help themselves" (372).

In contrast to what it sees as the Federal patronage of liberal politics, the Right has thus managed to project its own distinct vision of civic society that extols the virtues of individualism, local community and moral self-discipline: "a morning in America, based upon the small town, the frontier, the idealized family" (Lyons, 17). On first glance, there appear to be obvious contradictions to the aggressive way in which conservatives have sought to completely strip apart the structures enshrining egalitarian New Deal principles of a collective commonwealth, while at the same time extolling an alternative populist notion of cultural order and public morality. Lyons, for instance, has mentioned how the New Right's concept of political economy "tend[s] toward a libertarianism that exists in tension with their longings for family and community and their nostalgia for a politics that might successfully articulate a notion of the public interest" (198). Yet as Thompson points out, the Right's particular evocation of conservative cultural and moral values in recent American life is entirely consonant with their libertarian notions of economic individualism. For example, he discusses how "economic conservatives" and "religious conservatives" are drawn together by a "mutual interest in the reduction or complete annihilation of the power of the state and its ability to intervene in the affairs of civil society, whether this is in terms of the market or school prayer" (24). Both economy and culture, in this regard, take on aspects of a retrenched form of private living within the prevailing conservative mindset of recent years.[23]

[23] For example, Thompson argues that the "new provincialism" (19) of suburban life in contemporary America has developed alongside this conservative impulse toward socio-economic atomisation, in which the individual citizen has completely withdrawn from all sense of participation in what Rooseveltian liberal politics would consider the greater public good: "The new conservatism therefore not only possesses an economic agenda to expand the power and influence of capital, but it also gives room to the provincial and antiliberal traditions and sectors of American society that are firmly based in homogenized suburban enclaves that emphasize 'family values' and domesticity and that thrive on the notion of isolation, especially from urban areas" (20). This blissful sense of "isolation" from the non-homogenised "urban areas," according to Thompson, provides a comfortable screen for middle-class individuals from the social inequality suffered by minority and class groups in American.

Elsewhere, Philip Green provides an interesting exploration of the ways in which conservative economic principles of individualism and inequality have successfully managed to mobilise support among the American masses. He argues that the failure of liberals since the sixties to adequately address the shortcomings of "an economy that worsens the position of all but the well off" (33) has seen the increasingly disempowered (white) working class in America find a distinctly 'cultural' form of compensation in conservative attacks on notions of multiculturalism and gender equality. As a result of the way in which these issues of marginal identity have been associated by the Right with the elitist intellectualism of liberalism and its patronising attitude toward the common masses, Green suggests, many among the America's poorer classes have: "succumbed to the symbolic rewards of conservatism, its attacks on 'liberal elites' and other class enemies" (34). As Green suggests, the significant transition in attitudes toward the Federal State's role in public and economic life that has taken place since the late sixties has been helped, in large part, by the way in which the left-liberal agenda for social progress has been split from within by the more separatist aspects of identity politics. Gitlin attempts to make clear how the weakening of liberal notions of a shared cultural tradition by post-sixties cultural politics has meant that: "the idea of a common America, if there was to be one at all, was ceded, by default, to the Right" (1995, 73). The language of progressive freedoms that was once the domain of left-liberals, he argues, has now been adopted by the free market economic vision of the right:

> Today it is the Right that speaks a language of commonalities. Its rhetoric of global markets and global freedoms has something of the old universalist ring. To be on the Left, meanwhile, is to doubt that one can speak of humanity at all (84)

Paradise Lost: Re-membering an Era of Epic Origins

In the opening pages of *American Pastoral*, Zuckerman sets the scene for the almost paradisiacal experience of America in which both he and the Swede grew up. This moment of epic beginnings is defined by Zuckerman's fond memories of his childhood in the Jewish section of Newark. These recollections evoke a heightened

moment of historical opportunity for the inhabitants of this marginal ethnic enclave to assimilate themselves completely into the wider American culture. Zuckerman outlines the ways in which the progressive idealism that abounded in the period during and immediately following World War Two had allowed his family and neighbours to trade their previous experiences as socially marginalised Jews for full membership in what Wendy Wall describes as a "unifying national ideology" (6). The youthful Swede, whose outstanding athletic achievements marked him out as an inspiring paragon of American success, performs as the mythic hero in this narrative of symbolic passage into national life for Zuckerman's Jewish community. Zuckerman explains that as a "Jewish kid aspiring to be an all-American kid during the patriotic war years," his and the neighbourhood's joint "hope seemed to converge in the marvelous body of the Swede … this gifted boy's unsurpassable style" (19-20). Through the sporting triumphs of the Swede, the Newark Jews experienced "the happy release into a Swedian innocence" (4). There are, however, certain familiar parallels here with the individual experiences of characters in other Roth novels who seek to identify themselves with a greater notion of cultural belonging beyond that of their more narrow sense of Jewish origins. The euphoric instance of liberation and historical transformation for Zuckerman's ethnic community in the early passages of *American Pastoral* is, as in the personal ordeals of Alexander Portnoy, tempered by a sense of unfinished trauma associated with a more difficult past in which Jews were left to struggle on the margins of mainstream American life. Described as both a "symbol of hope" and "an *instrument* of history" (5), the youthful Swede provided what Zuckerman describes as a powerful, yet "delusionary kind of sustenance" through which: "our families could forget the way things work and make an athletic performance the repository of all their hopes … [p]rimarily, they could forget the war" (4). Through the "Swede and his unconscious oneness with America" (20), destructive experiences of war, poverty and anti-Semitism – "the way things actually work" – that have scarred Zuckerman's Jewish neighbourhood in the past are comfortably forgotten. Over the course of this chapter, I will examine how the trauma of historical exclusion from the wider culture, which seems to be erased by this significant moment for American Jews of renewal and reinvention as fully assimilated members of

the national polity, is in fact never fully finished or healed in Roth's novel. Despite the apparent "oneness with America" that defines the "pastoral" sense of peaceful unity and fertile hope in the young lives of Zuckerman and the Swede, they are reluctantly forced to acknowledge in later life their divided heritage as Jewish-Americans.

In an address which he writes for, but does not deliver at his 50th high-school reunion, Zuckerman develops a greater sense of the particular national experience in which this mythic narrative of Jewish acculturation is situated. In this speech, Zuckerman deploys certain stock images of the vastly increased sense of socio-economic opportunity and national cultural unity that came to popularly define the post-war era of liberal consensus. He recalls an overriding spirit of American historical progress during this period, in which prevailed a distinctly palpable sense that the nation was collectively escaping from the hardships of the past and moving toward a much improved future. Of particular note is the way in which these remarkable benefits of American life had a decidedly favourable impact upon the Jews of Zuckerman's generation:

> Around us nothing was lifeless. Sacrifice and constraint were over. The Depression had disappeared. Everything was in motion. The lid was off. Americans were to start over again, en masse, everyone in it together (40)

The sense of historical grievance – inherent in the experience of "being battered" during The Depression, the horrors of World War Two and "a generalized mistrust of the Gentile world" (41) – that had previously wounded the lives of Zuckerman and the Swede's Jewish parents are nowhere evidenced within this utopian image of new American beginnings. According to Zuckerman's somewhat sentimental reflections, post-war America proffered a life-world in which older forms of social division and dissatisfaction were kept in check by the euphoria of national optimism and togetherness that abounded: "the upsurge of energy was contagious" (40). He goes on to explain how kernel liberal values of rationalised balances, reasoned gradualism and democratic tolerance helped to underwrite the incredible sense of belonging to this progressive American narrative among the Jewish families of Newark. For example, the

"undercurrent of anxiety" which lay dormant in memories of the Depression was stifled by an unerring faith in the rational belief that hard work would bring about a steady improvement of historical conditions:

> The place was bright with industriousness. There was a big belief in life and we were steered relentlessly in the direction of success: a better existence was going to be ours (41)

The assured and propitious sense of collective unity that defined the historical moment in which he spent his adolescence is also defined for Zuckerman by its peaceful level of generational harmony. Much contrasted with the fierce generational divide that would come to mark the later conflicts of the sixties, Zuckerman recalls with affection a time in which the "unflagging illusions about our perfectibility" held by parents was matched by a reluctance to "roam very far from the permissible" (42) among the young. Such a portrait of familial and social cohesion provides an idyllic contrast to Merry's violent fury against her parents in the novel. It also invokes the cosy and contained world of Jewish family origins with which Zuckerman himself would be later in conflict as an aspiring literary artist. Zuckerman's speech, therefore, can be understood as a reflection upon innocent childhood origins where everything appeared cohesive and secure in its assigned place. However, it is important to note how this is a self-consciously mythic outline of Zuckerman's early sense of familial and national belonging; a pastoral sphere in which the rage and desire that will later drive his authorial efforts to reinvent the established "facts" is glaringly missing.

It is the adult Swede, as Zuckerman reconstructs him, who has striven to keep fully intact this innocent setting of pastoral unities. The Swede embodies in person the liberal consensus spirit of compromise between contending voices and interests which Zuckerman's speech evokes. For example, in dealing with the burgeoning radicalism of his daughter, the Swede insists upon keeping open a rational dialogue with Merry, despite the extremities to which her language veers: "[t]he important thing is not to abandon her and not to capitulate to her, and to keep talking even if you have to say the same thing over and over and over" (103). Insisting upon a liberal balance between

tolerance and restraint, the Swede personifies the consensus idea of the "vital center" in his attempts to resolve, with force of reason, the political differences between himself and Merry. As I will discuss at greater length later on, the Swede articulates a view of industrial production at his glove factory that enshrines consensus ideas about the mutual beneficence of labour and capital in post-war America. The Newark Maid plant provides an oddly "pastoral" setting in which the opposing interests of the toiling workforce and capitalist owner appear perfectly harmonised. This consensus liberal ideal of an organised and mutually beneficial balance between different and often contending social forces finds another expression in the Swede's uncomplicated sense of being both Jewish and American. Refusing to see the relevance to his own life of past tensions between Jews and Gentiles, the Swede points toward "the realities of the post-war world, where people can live in harmony, all sorts of people live side by side no matter what their origins" (311). Through such mythic evocations of consensus values, Roth's novel establishes the pastoral landscape of the Swede's America. By containing ideological extremes within a harmonious balance of opposing forces, this liberal idyll appears blissfully shorn of any impeding experiences of social marginality or historical grievance.

Merry's bomb acts as the gaping lack or un-reclaimable trauma that has exiled the Swede from this American Eden. He is cast from a world in which he "felt *himself* to add up, add up exactly to one" (191), and thrust into the chaos caused by the anticipation of "[t]he unexpected thing [that] would be waiting there unseen, for the rest of his life ripening, just a millimeter behind everything else" (176). While his daughter moves further toward extreme ideological opposition to the Vietnam War, the Swede remains trapped within the increasingly impoverished limits of his notion of liberal dialogue and compromise. As his brother Jerry tells him, the Swede's unfailing sense of "[t]olerant respect for every position" signals nothing more than a liberal myth of conflict-free consensus that render him helpless in attempting to prevent or even conceptualise Merry's act of political violence:

> Sure, it's 'liberal' – I know, a liberal father. But what does that mean? What is at the *center* of it? Always holding things together. And look where the fuck it's got you! (279)

The novel is punctuated by many moments in which the Swede's "vital center" philosophy of "holding things together" in pastoral unity is confronted by a crippling sense of traumatic dissonance. Yet in spite of such insistent reminders of the overwhelming trauma that now lies at the centre of his life, the Swede continues to summon forth a fairytale narrative of self, family and home in which the horror of Merry's bomb remains notably absent. Despite his various efforts to rationally explain the origin of his daughter's actions, he is ultimately unable to understand or locate the source of her profound unhappiness with him and the liberal "establishment" version of America that he represents. The novel offers little more than a sense of his complete incomprehension toward the outcome of events: "[n]*one of this could possibly be*" (241). Arrested by the disorienting shock of what has occurred, the Swede continues to rehearse the dreadful event without ever fully making it pass into conscious experience. Unable to comprehend the "counterpastoral" (86) disorder wreaked by Merry and her New Left cohort, he struggles throughout the novel to reassert the completed and unbroken totality of his pre-sixties life, in which the "fluctuations [were] predictable, the combat containable, [and] the surprises satisfying" (413). However, this desire to restore his life of simple assurances and self-contained borders is made frustrated by the inexpressible sense of horror and chaos that attends Merry's act of terrorism: "[h]e had seen the way that it is, seen out beyond … to all there is that cannot be bounded" (418). In this fashion, the Swede is torn apart by the paradoxical experience of a trauma that demands understanding and yet which exceeds his impoverished attempts to comprehend or articulate it.

Critical Reactions to *American Pastoral*

Robert Cohen has asked whether, "in portraying the '6os as an aberrational tear in the American fabric, the writer may be hitting the nostalgia button a bit too hard" (19). Similarly, Michael Wood has remarked upon the novel's "attachment to the romance of ordinariness" (8) in its heroic portrayal of the Swede, while Robert Boyers

has discussed how "Roth is most taken with his character's desire to be ordinary, at ease in his place, … without any desire to tear through appearances or to rage against his own limitations" (37). According to such initial critical reactions, Roth's novel recapitulates certain stock conservative clichés of the New Left as a diabolical or "aberrational" attack upon the sense of vibrant and rich cultural life that existed prior to the sixties. What this line of argument asserts is that *American Pastoral* upholds a sentimental ideal of tradition, family, work and social convention against the flimsy and violent political fantasies enacted by New Left agitators. Boyers has underlined how the conservative "tendency to reduce the movements of the '60s to an undifferentiated cartoon of adolescent rebellion is given new life in Roth's novel" (41). Continuing in this vein, Edward Alexander has remarked upon how Merry "feeds her six-foot frame on every trendy New Left cliché" (184), while for Paul Gediman she represents "nothing more than the screaming face of chaos, the avatar of utter vandalism." Todd Gitlin contributes further to this overall assessment by criticising "Roth's failure to bring the sixties to life" (1997, 64). What renders "much of the story's [historical] atmospherics redundant," Gitlin explains, is the manner in which it contributes to a wider (postmodern) exhaustion of literary realism, largely conditioned by the fact that: "a sense of the real … is exactly what shook, rattled, rolled and eventually blew up in the sixties" (64).

In detailing how his daughter's radicalism and other such forces of turmoil have fractured the Swede's idyll, *American Pastoral* does, in fact, adopt a certain superficial tone of pining for the sense of cultural cohesion that had prevailed in America prior to the sixties. Yet, I wish to argue that the Swede's longing to return to a state of pre-traumatic unity is continually disrupted in the novel by a sense of "all there is that cannot be bounded" by his pastoral myth of self, family and nation. In what follows, I will examine how various historical inconsistencies and experiences of discord that are repressed within the Swede's nostalgic vision of the past find exploration through the critical filter that Zuckerman's narrative presence brings to the text. Having himself witnessed and endured the tearing apart of his generation's euphoric sense of national idealism in the immediate aftermath of World War Two, Zuckerman helps bring to the

novel's attention certain marginal experiences of class, race and gender that were silenced by the Swede and America's consensus narrative. Much like Merry's bomb, these liminal experiences remain repressed within the Swede's romantic yearning for the glowing American scene of his youth. However, through Zuckerman's narrative mediation of the Swede's perspective, such hidden traumas find particularly disruptive moments of uncanny return. In creating a subtle dialogic tension between his two sites of narrative consciousness – Zuckerman and the Swede – Roth thus manages to puncture holes within his novel's ostensible tone of elegy for a more innocent American past.

Some of the subsequent critical heritage has upheld the narrow view of *American Pastoral* as a straight forward lament for a lost notion of cohesive cultural origins.[24] Other commentaries, however, have gone further in locating a greater sense of unease in Roth's novel toward the Swede and his ideal of America by exploring the important narrative relationship that the novel enacts between Zuckerman and his protagonist. Derek Parker Royal has criticised those who have "accused Roth in *American Pastoral* … of 'softening' his harsh edges and giving in to the myth of the American dream" (2001, 6). Instead, Royal explores the manner in which "Zuckerman creates his hero's story not necessarily for the purpose of understanding the high school legend, but to understand himself" (14). Murray Baumgarten adds to this line of argument by suggesting that "the central insight of Nathan's understanding … helps us comprehend and acknowledge the terrible cost of Levov's success" (2002, 293). For both scholars, Zuckerman focuses upon the failed American idyll of the Swede in a way that serves to continue his (and Roth's) ongoing examination of the limits of Jewish assimilation into the wider culture.[25] Timothy Parrish also weighs in on this Jewish thematic within *American Pastoral* by suggesting that "Zuckerman … encases Swede's story within his

[24] Bonnie Lyons has argued that: "the pastoral, which is wittily and ironically deflated in *The Counterlife*, is here, like Swede himself, mourned as tragic loss" (2005b, 127). Similarly, Tom Wilhelmus remarks how: "Roth's powerful exculpation of the Swede is remarkable especially considering the manner in which he has treated such persons in the past" (520-21).

[25] For example, Baumgarten explains how "Nathan confronts the complexities of his own American and Jewish experience" (2002, 291) through his narration of the life of the Swede. He goes on to argue that the "unfolding events of *American Pastoral* … reveal the tragic dimensions of the bargain Seymour has implicitly negotiated with American culture" (294).

own son-beset-by-father-and-Jews narrative" (2005b, 135). He argues that the Swede's determination to reject his Jewish father and discover a completely new sense of himself in America represents an "exhaustion of identity" (147) within the post-ethnic dream of nationhood. Debra Shostak touches briefly upon the relationship between history and trauma that will be explored to much greater effect in my own study. She argues that the Swede's pastoral life is "driven by its repressed moments of historical trauma" (242). Explaining that "the Swede's fall is Zuckerman's as well" (247), Shostak has outlined how the novel's narrator locates in the story of his protagonist's tragedy his own experience of displacement from a heightened sense of national origins.[26] Each of these critics offers a useful way of looking at the narrative relationship between Zuckerman and the Swede as members of the same post-war generation of American Jews. Their arguments will, in certain ways, find some correlation in my own study's examination of Roth's dialogical narrative structure. However, I wish to go further by providing a greater sense of historical specificity with regards to how the distinct conflicts of the sixties inform Roth's efforts to broach issues of ethnic subjectivity, national culture and narrative style in *American Pastoral*.

More so than most, Sandra Kumamoto Stanley offers a more extensive awareness of the particular ideological foundations and weaknesses of the Swede's pastoral sensibility. She discusses the prevailing post-war ideal of a liberal consensus and how its American exceptionalist notions of pastoral or Edenic renewal found expression in the "myth and symbol" school of national literary history, as exemplified by such seminal works as Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* and R.W.B. Lewis's *The American Adam*. The Swede's downfall, according to her, marks a coming apart of these post-war liberal notions of the American cultural heritage: "[c]onsensus – epitomized in the Swede's yearning for oneness and sameness – has given way to theories of difference, rupturing a consensus ideology reflected in modernist visions of history and literary theory" (18). Stanley's global ideological view of the liberal

[26] "Nathan's generation has been made impotent by their desires, by the image of America they thought they were recreating in their own lives, their choices circumscribed, unbeknownst to them, by a culture increasingly hostile to its own self-image" (249).

consensus narrative – particularly its literary branch of thought – and how it finds critical examination in *American Pastoral* is highly informative of the historical issues at stake in Roth's novel. However, my own study aims to provide a more detailed and complex focus upon the marginal experiences that emerge from within the Swede's containing notion of cultural consensus. In doing so, I wish to examine how Roth's novel looks beyond Kumanoto's suggestion that the sixties saw the giving way of a "modernist visions of history and literary theory" to postmodernist "theories of difference." Furthermore, I will suggest, in ways that Kumamoto has failed to, how the crisis offset within American liberalism during the sixties finds links in *American Pastoral* with Roth's own troubled relationship to notions of literary heritage.

Anthony Hutchinson provides, by far, the most detailed examination of "those questions pertaining to the postwar liberal political tradition under consideration" (116) in Roth's novel. Writing in response to Norman Podhoretz's review of Roth's novel for *Commentary*, he sets out to challenge what he calls the former's "eager[ness] to attach a particular type of neoconservative agenda to *American Pastoral*" (114). Hutchinson discusses how the Swede's consensus ideal of balance and open tolerance, especially in terms of how it has debilitated him in dealing with his daughter's extremist form of political dissent, is represented in the novel as "the 'de-vitalized' center of post-Vietnam American politics" (127). He suggests that, as a result of his inability to impose his paternal authority, "the Swede has come to occupy the type of moral no-man's land many neoconservatives would later identify as the defining feature of mid-century liberalism" (127). However, Hutchinson insists that Roth's attack on the "politics of disengagement" involved in this notion of "'weak' liberalism" (126) is not carried out in the name of neoconservativism. Instead, he argues that *American Pastoral*'s critique of liberal consensus orthodoxies finds its main source of expression in the "robust New Deal liberalism of the father" (126), as voiced by Lou Levov in the novel. According to Hutchinson, therefore, Roth's text firmly claims allegiance to the older and more "'strong' liberalism" (126) of Lou. I would share with Hutchinson a resistance toward certain critical approaches, typified by Podhoretz, that attribute to *American Pastoral* a

neoconservative backlash against the naiveties and weaknesses of the liberal consensus. My own argument also tends to share with his a sense of how Roth is interested in the declining authority of Rooseveltian liberalism. However, I would diverge from Hutchinson by suggesting that the delusive pastoral innocence of the Swede's consensus ideology finds its origin in the older liberal sentiments of his father. As the later sections to this chapter will discuss, stern values relating to notions of work, ethnicity and masculinity that have been handed down to him by Lou do find a form of weakening or emasculation in the hands of the Swede. Yet, I will suggest that the diminishing sense of patriarchal authority which is identifiable in the Swede's "weak" liberal mindset can be traced back, paradoxically, to Lou's virile presence in the text as the overbearing father. I wish to thus argue against Hutchinson's highly gendered notion that Roth sees the Swede's and, by implication, post-war American liberalism's demise in simple terms of a lamentable decline in masculine authority. *American Pastoral* does not, as Hutchinson suggests, attempt to restore the symbolic authority of the father by castigating the "devitalized" masculinity of the son. Instead, Roth is interested in the limits of notions of paternity and origin that are embodied by Lou and his liberal political values, particularly as they are adopted and adapted by the Swede.

Narrative Structure: Dialogism and Impersonation

Zuckerman's relationship to the Swede and his American world in the text can be understood in terms of the implications that pastoral notions of cohesion and plenitude have for issues of narrative and desire in Roth's literature. As I have discussed in my introduction, Zuckerman explores in *The Counterlife* the notion of the pastoral as "desire's homeland," free of the conflicts between Eros and Thanatos that engender his many fictional variations on 'real' life. Described as "the desired object of all this asexual lovemaking" (5) within Zuckerman's childhood community, the Swede represents this prelapsarian idea of gratified desire, exempt from thanatological complications or frustrations. In outlining the "asexual" character of the America of his youth, Zuckerman explains how "the mandatory turbulence born of need, appetite,

fantasy, longing and the fear of disgrace" within adolescence was kept in check by "an era when chastity was still ascendant, a national cause to be embraced by the young like freedom and democracy" (43). This temperate idea of desire – neutered of the volatile aspects of sexual longing evidenced elsewhere in Roth's fiction – finds satisfactory expression in the contained limits and clear boundaries of a pastoral world that is innocent of loss or self-division. As with this cohesive notion of fully realised desire, narrative in the Swede's idyllic scene finds a satisfactory plenum of the 'real.' Just as desire is extricated from any experiences of dissatisfaction or frustration in this mythic version of America, the pastoral landscape of the Swede is made evident by a language of signs that is impervious to contaminating notions of surplus or supplement: "[e]verything always added up to something whole" (191). Remembering the innocent relationship between words and objects that operated during his childhood in Newark, Zuckerman recalls "the unfiltered way meaning comes to children, just flowing off the surface of things" (43). This sense of the indivisible meaning legible on "the surface of things" is best demonstrated by the "special luminosity" (30) of the Swede's heroic image. He is recalled by Zuckerman as an object of pure presence and immanent meaning, demonstrating "[n]o striving, no ambivalence, no doubleness – just the style, the natural physical refinement of a star" (20).

Zuckerman's narrative complicates the Swede's pastoral of contented desire and unbounded fertility by exploring how trauma has subjected such notions of innocence and unity to a helpless state of impotent frustration. This sense of thwarted longing is evidenced by what happens to the Swede's notion of language following the explosion of Merry's bomb: "[h]e saw that everything you say says either more than you wanted it to say or less than you wanted it to say" (93). As with Zuckerman in earlier works, the Swede is made to realise that his desire to author or possess a sense of what is 'real' about himself and his world is made subject to hopeless uncertainty. The ostensible fidelity shown to the Swede's pastoral sensibility in the novel is thus placed in tension with Zuckerman's narrative awareness that its ideal of coherence and plenitude is inscribed by a "missing piece" (37). Although his account is propelled by a narrative

urge to “make the Swede whole and coherent” (37), Zuckerman reflects upon the propensity for error which inheres in the fact that our knowledge of ‘real’ lives and experiences contains a fundamental gap:

> The fact remains that getting people right is not what living is all about anyway. It’s getting them wrong that is living, getting them wrong and wrong and wrong and then, on careful reconsideration, getting them wrong again (35)

Explaining that he “was working with traces” of information only, the ‘real’ or “primary Swede” (76) remains somewhat of a mystery to Zuckerman throughout the text. Due to the paucity of known “facts,” he relies upon his imaginative prowess as a writer to author a credible biography for his protagonist. “[L]acking entirely the unique substantiality of the real thing” (76-77), Zuckerman explains, he “dreamed a realistic chronicle” (89) of the Swede’s life. Such a paradoxical statement of verisimilar intent captures Roth’s notion of how literature serves as a means of knowing the ‘real’ through an always “wrong,” yet incalculably variable process of narrative invention. It is only through his various novelistic speculations upon the hidden secrets or traumas in the Swede’s past that Zuckerman is able to make his protagonist ‘real,’ albeit in a way that remains decidedly incomplete. This narrative strategy is typical of Roth’s complex style of realist fiction that offers a rich and illuminative exploration upon actual life, while never quite achieving aesthetic mastery over “the real thing.”

This strange admixture of dream and reality, fiction and fact in Roth’s work informs the tensions between nostalgic reverie and undisclosed traumatic experience that is interwoven throughout the narrative fabric of *American Pastoral*. In many ways, Zuckerman inhabits the Swede’s dreamful state of pastoral consciousness in order to examine what is “wrong” with or missing from its particularly simplistic and contented notion of life. Having re-united briefly with his boyhood hero over dinner in the mid ’90s, Zuckerman is shocked by “how assured he [the Swede] seemed of everything commonplace he said, and how everything he said was suffused by his good nature” (23). Despite the sense of an uninterrupted life of success and happiness that appears

abundant in the aged Swede's glimmering surfaces and gestures, Zuckerman – who, as yet, is uninformed about Merry and her bomb – seeks to unearth the "disorders" (37) that lay concealed behind these displays of innocent satisfaction. Insisting that "more was there than what I was looking at" (38), Zuckerman speculates upon the possible, yet hidden, experiences of loss and turmoil which might give lie to the Swede's chimera of a: "*life* [that] *had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore just great, right in the American grain*" (31). In a way that recalls his many conflicts with the "unvarnished facts" in earlier novels, Zuckerman attempts in this particular situation to find an anchor for his artistic imagination by seeking to challenge and contravene what passes as 'real' within his protagonist's seemingly perfect existence. However, their meeting mostly serves to arouse what Zuckerman calls "my professional impatience" (30) with a subject whose "simple and sincere … relationship to himself" (36) frustrates his authorial ambitions to imagine a more complex life for the Swede: "I kept waiting for him to lay bare something more than this pointed unobjectionableness, but all that rose to the surface was more surface" (23).

Although the revelations about Merry's terrorism are yet to be made when the two men meet, Zuckerman's insistence that "there had to have been blight" (20) in the Swede's seemingly perfect life is informed by his own personal experiences of loss. Highly aware that "[n]o one gets through unmarked by brooding, grief, confusion, and loss" (20), Zuckerman has also seen the dismantling of his childhood romance with America. He, like the Swede, has been banished from his American Eden and cast into an uncertain and 'unreal' world, mediated by narrative fictions that are always, in some way, "wrong." Although he does not elaborate to any great extent in *American Pastoral* upon the personal and historical particulars that have precipitated this experience of loss, Zuckerman indicates how it is related to aging and a growing awareness of mortality; in the passage from a youthfully innocent relationship between the world and self toward old age and death, as evidenced by his experience with prostate cancer. Of course, this corruptive de-idealisation of what was once very much 'real' about life in post-war America is pivotal to Zuckerman's (and Roth's) notion of literary authorship as an

unceasing erotic quest for narrative mastery over the challenging and unruly "facts" of existence. However, Zuckerman now lives in isolated exile, away from the anguishing forms of "wear and tear" (64) that had characterised his literary engagements with 'real' life in previous novels. As he explains to the Swede's brother, Jerry at their 50th high-school reunion, his ascetic withdrawal from quotidian social existence has afforded him a means of "keep[ing] the shit at bay":

> The pictures we have of one another. Layers and layers of misunderstanding. The picture we have of *ourselves*. Useless. Presumptuous. Completely cocked-up. Only we go ahead and we *live* by these pictures. 'That's what she is, that's what he is, this is what I am. This is what happened, this is *why* it happened – ' Enough. (64)

As in *I Married a Communist*, Zuckerman is expressing here a certain longing to extricate himself from the endless "layers" of possible narrative disguises and meanings that had been so rampantly displayed in *The Counterlife* and elsewhere. This represents what Roth described in *The Facts* as a wish to "restore my experience to the original, prefictionalized factuality" (3). It is this yearning for an end to the many fraught conflicts of narrative and desire that makes memories of the Swede and his pastoral utopia somewhat appealing to Zuckerman. These recollections represent a lost notion of unified origins ("desire's homeland"), in which what was once 'real' remained indivisible and impervious to dispute.

As I have suggested, Zuckerman's decision to retreat from the greater social world has been informed by the eviscerating effects of aging and sickness. Having suffered impotence as a result of cancer surgery, he has been relinquished of the erotic energy that had previously charged his many fictional assaults upon 'real' life. On learning during their meeting that both of them have suffered from the same illness, Zuckerman ponders to what extent the Swede might share with him a sense of being "deformed by the prospect of death" (30). However, the Swede plays down the effects of his cancer – which, unknown to his interlocutor, is terminal at the time of their meeting – and refutes the suggestion made by Zuckerman that he, too, might have suffered impotence following the removal of his prostate. Instead, he remains, even in old age, an

example of near youthful vigour and potency, leaving Zuckerman to conclude that "this big jeroboam of self-contentment really was in possession of all he ever had wanted" (29). Yet despite the sense of a rich and happy existence that the Swede appears to exude on their reunion, Zuckerman is adamant that both of them have been left somewhat at a loss by a shared intimation of mortality and vulnerability. It is this sense of thanatological devastation that, he believes, is being kept hidden by the Swede's outward display of "self-contentment." Amid his frustration in trying to prize open a sense of the Swede's inner-turmoil, Zuckerman explains that "I couldn't imagine him at all, having come down with my own strain of the Swede's disorder: the inability to draw conclusions about anything but surfaces" (30). Zuckerman indicates here how both he and the Swede have suffered from the irretrievable loss of a referential origin, upon which their unified concept of life as children in post-war America was based. As a result, both men are left to trade only in "surfaces" that no longer guarantee access to a world that is definitively knowable or 'real,' but which instead involve a fictional masquerade or impersonation of reality that is always, ultimately, mutable and "wrong."

Zuckerman explains that his fictional strategy in reconstructing the life of the Swede involves the effort "to inhabit this person least like myself, [to] disappear into him" (74). By doing exactly this, he appears to vanish from the narrative at an early stage of the novel. Not only does he leave the text as a novelistic character, but Zuckerman's narrative perspective appears to merge with the pastoral consciousness of the Swede. The conflation of separate viewpoints that results is indicative of the indirect (or dialogic) speech that Volosinov and Bakhtin have both labelled "quasi-direct discourse." This subtle obfuscation of Zuckerman and the Swede's voices is perhaps what has led various commentators to link the particular form of cultural nostalgia held by the novel's protagonist directly to its narrator and, by extension, author. However, the elegiac aura that shrouds the novel should not be mistaken for an expression of Zuckerman or Roth's 'real' voice, but rather seen in dialogic terms as an impersonation of the Swede's. By facilitating a certain critical distance between each voice, this mode of ventriloquism allows Zuckerman to inhabit the Swede's nostalgia for a lost pastoral

and explore the lacunae within its reified idea of presence. In contrast with the sentimentality that pervaded his high-school reunion, Zuckerman's sets out to capture what he calls "the ultimate reunion story" (80) between the Swede's self-referential surfaces and their concealed experiences of trauma; the post-war pastoral and the "indigenous American berserk" evoked by the '60s.

Much like the Swede himself, Zuckerman is unwilling or unable to articulate his overwhelmingly painful and incomprehensible experiences of personal loss in the novel. As the narrative informs us, the Swede represses any signs of the inner turmoil caused by Merry's bomb through an outward impersonation of his former, unhinged self: "nothing to be done but respectably carry on the huge pretense of living as himself, with all the shame of masquerading as the ideal man" (174). In many ways, this stoic sense of "a performance over a ruin" (81) is mirrored by Zuckerman's overall narrative strategy in the novel. By disappearing from the text and disguising himself within the Swede's viewpoint, he manages to conceal the story of his own anguished despair with a world in which our narrative assertions about reality are always incomplete and subject to raging dispute. Yet this impersonating mode also involves an act of narrative self-exposure, by which Zuckerman is located as a corporeal and desiring presence within the narrative. In his efforts to imaginatively navigate his way through the manifold "layers" of grief and confusion that comprised the chaotic existence concealed beneath the Swede's cohesive self-mythology, Zuckerman once more exercises his dormant, yet still somewhat potent, desire to impose his literary authorship on the contingent and transient facts of 'real' life. The dialogical tension between Zuckerman's erotic presence and impotent sense of resignation in the novel can be explained in terms of the relationship of traumatised victim to trauma witness. By detailing what is for the Swede an inexplicable experience of trauma, Zuckerman attempts to make more familiar and recognisable his own comparable sense of life as wounded and incoherent. In this way, he is relocated in the text by evidence of his burning personal desire to understand the chaotic and "berserk" sense of reality in which he has also lived, despite his stated determination to remove himself from what has previously been such an agonising narrative pursuit. Perplexed by

his own narrative obsession to locate some hidden or deeper meaning in the ostensibly bland and uncomplicated figure of the Swede that he meets in the mid-90s, Zuckerman unwittingly reveals a sense of this unconscious desire for some form of self-understanding in *American Pastoral*: "[w]hy the appetite to know this guy?" (38). Zuckerman tendency to "clutch at" (39) the Swede in the novel thus serves as a displaced means by which to make sense of his own, otherwise, inassimilable experience of personal trauma.

The remaining sections in this chapter will outline how Roth's novel re-explores certain repressed experiences within the Swede's post-war utopia of national consensus. Zuckerman's narrative works somewhat like Merry's bomb in the way that it registers the impact of a trauma that explodes the Swede's compact economy of the 'real.' The manner in which the novel brings to the surface aspects of the inconceivable horrors that the Swede seeks to bury or disown finds resonance in the rhetoric of Merry's Weathermen Movement:

> We are against everything that is good and decent in honky America. We will loot and burn and destroy. We are the incubation of your mother's nightmares (252)

Significantly, Roth's treatment of the marginal issues of labour, race and gender in the Swede's pastoral narrative is consistent with certain of the political and cultural concerns of the sixties New Left and its later incarnations in post-sixties' identity politics. Figures in the text such as Merry, Angela Davis and Rita Cohen all vocalise a political opposition to the Swede's America in the name of these oppressed social groups. Furthermore, contrasts can be made between how Zuckerman and Merry have both sought self-liberation through their angry defiance of paternal authority. For example, Timothy Parrish reminds us how both Merry and Zuckerman "share as distinguishing character traits a relentless commitment to transformation and the desire to disrupt all pretensions to complacency" (2005b, 138). However, Zuckerman's narrative does not offer a fully sympathetic hearing to the various New Left voices in the novel. Merry and the other figures of the militant left in the text are brought to life

through various worn-out ideological clichés. For example, Rita's diatribe against what she sees as the evils of the Swede's "paternal capitalism" (135) is fairly consistent with the latter's description of her as a "kid with a head full of fantasies about the 'working class'" (134). Merry's political speech, at times, mirrors the pastoral language of her father in so much as it makes fantastical and utopian claims about what is 'real.' The rhetoric that she and other New Leftists articulate in the novel are described in terms of: "[t]he monotonous chant of the indoctrinated, ideologically armoured from head to foot … those whose turbulence can be caged only within the suffocating straitjacket of the most supercoherent of dreams" (245).

Much like the Zionism of Mordecai Lipmann in *The Counterlife*, Johnny O'Day's Marxist doctrine in *I Married a Communist*, and Delphine Le Roux's political correctness in *The Human Stain*, both the pastoral and its "counterpastoral" (86) critique in this particular novel are weighted by equally "supercoherent" historical narratives. Such uncomplicated claims to 'reality' or 'fact' are anathema to Zuckerman's statement that we are constantly "wrong" in our presumptions to knowledge about 'real' life. In reading Roth's novel, I would argue that it gives expression to both the sentimental backward glance of conservatives and the year-zero iconoclasm of the New Left, without endorsing either cultural vision. Instead, Roth offers a more complex sense of the social conflicts in post-war America, before and after the sixties, which are elided by these simplistic visions of nostalgia and apocalypse. As my discussion on the historical context suggests, the notion of a culture war emerging from the sixties does not necessarily take place along the same battle lines as the economic and political divisions between the New Right and old-fashioned, New Deal liberalism. By focusing on the material relationship between class, race and gender in *American Pastoral*, Roth brings attention to certain socio-economic experience that are often obscured by the cultural debates between Left and Right since the sixties. Yet, this is not to say that *American Pastoral* uncovers some deep-rooted notion of a material historical referent. Instead, it traces the historical erosion of the sense of a 'real' that was once located by a narrative of material work. In what follows, I wish to make clear how the history of labour at the

Swede's glove factory traces a major decline in the notion of a 'real' or authentic experience in post-war American life that finds obvious correlates with Zuckerman's (and Roth's) struggle to write about a reality that is always ungraspable or unknowable. Furthermore, I will discuss how the submerged experiences of class, race and gender that the text uncovers within the Swede's idyllic world help to locate certain problems of artistic labour, masculinity and ethnic subjectivity that have characterised Zuckerman's life and writing.

Newark Maid Productions: Work as Pastoral Commodity

Central to the Swede's nostalgia for his lost pastoral is an idealised notion of the work practices carried out at his factory, Newark Maid. The history of Newark Maid – as authored by the Swede and his father, Lou – acts as a memorial to the patriarchal traditions of artisan glove production. It eulogises the values of skilled knowledge, hard work and responsible manhood, passed on from authoritative father to dutiful son. The Levov men are driven on by their proud knowledge of what makes a good glove and the understanding that it is only achieved if, according to Lou's repeated platitude, "[y]ou work at it" (119). This is a materialist narrative that outlines with great affection how the transmission from father to son of skilled production knowledge has helped to reproduce a wider sense of patriarchal authority and social order. The cultural dislocations that take place within the sixties – generational revolt, racial tension and a general sense of national moral decline – are attributed in the novel, particularly by Lou, to a sudden decline in American industry and a subsequent erosion of the social values that are attached to work. In this way, the Newark Maid narrative of skilled labour and its antiquated traditions represents a material sense of what was cohesively 'real' and substantial in the lost cultural life-world for which the Swede pines in the novel.

Certain critics, by confusing the narrative's superficial tone of nostalgia for the past with the author's viewpoint, have tended to read the novel's treatment of glove making at Newark Maid as a paean to the Swede's simple and uncontested virtues of

work, masculinity and tradition. Edward Alexander argues that "productive labor" carried out at Newark Maid is endowed with a greater material import by Roth than the utopian fantasies of Merry and her political allies: "[w]ork is real; idealistic sloganeering about exploitation of workers by profit hungry bosses is idle wind" (184). Elsewhere, Mark Shechner echoes the Swede's highly romanticised view of the company's earliest artisan workers by suggesting that "[t]his isn't Marx's alienated labor or Merry Levov's exploited proletariat; these are people sewing together their very own lives" (2007, 144). However, Lou and the Swede's particular idea of work as a material form of cultural reproduction is shadowed by the unregistered experience of trauma that is inflicted upon skilled artisan labour at the moment of its relocation within the factory system of Newark Maid. In keeping with his notion of pastoral unity, the Swede sees his factory as an industrial idyll in which the usual confrontations between the forces of capital and labour are elided. Over the following number of pages, I wish to show how the history of Newark Maid – from its origins in the ethnic artisan community of 1930's Newark to the overseas workforce of its global expansion in the 1970's – is primarily concerned with a motivation for capital that aggressively clashes with the Swede's vocal passion for upholding the long and glorious tradition of skilled glove work. In Newark Maid's energetic drive to appropriate labour for profit, the artisan traditions of glove making undergo a traumatic process of dislocation and emasculation that is unacknowledged by or 'unreal' to the Swede's sentimental narrative of the work carried out at his plant. It is possible to read within the idealisation of particular work practices in *American Pastoral* examples of how this unspoken and hidden trauma is re-visited at certain stages, forming an antagonistic presence within the narrative's ostensibly nostalgic direction.

These tensions within the Swede's reified idea of artisan customs are made evident during a particular scene where he visits the de-industrialised wasteland of Newark in the early '70s. Recalled by the Swede as a once great powerhouse of industrial production, Newark has become a place of dereliction and social devastation. He describes the factories that have been evacuated and left to decay by the movement of production overseas as "[t]he Pyramids of Newark," ruins of a lost civilisation: "[i]t

was Newark that was entombed there, a city that was not going to stir again" (219). It is from within this abject scene of urban decline that the Swede reminisces about an earlier time during which he escorted his father to the "Down Neck" area of Newark, where they paid visits to the homes of Italian glove makers whose produce was bought and sold by their then burgeoning business. These memories recall a world of rarefied craft and rich cultural tradition that has been entirely lost within the decay of post-sixties' Newark. However, the Swede's considerable affection for the customs and work practices of pre-industrialised craftsmanship contains certain glaring contradictions. As I will suggest below, the childhood memories of immigrant life in Down Neck that make up this scene are not simply nostalgic and restorative. Instead, such recollections involve a process of memory distortion that is in fact closely linked to the upheaval that has removed artisan work from the homes of independent producers and relocated it into the centralised factory system. In turn, this seismic transition in the modes of production is inextricably linked to the later stage of de-industrialisation, as a result of which Newark has become so lamentably ruinous.

The weekly visits paid to the "eight, ten, twelve immigrant families" (221) who did piece work for Lou are coalesced into the timeless and uniform experience of childhood's "vague memories" (220) by the adult Swede. These uncertain recollections find their pristine object in a sentimental portrait of an Italian artisan family, into which is distilled all labour history among Newark Maid's earliest workers. This monumentalised setting of an Italian home is one in which the unique skills of family production are tied in with the transmission of particular forms of historical knowledge and customs. The Swede luxuriates in visceral memories of being fondly spoken to in a Neapolitan dialect while being taught "how to dip the crisp Italian bread in a pot of tomato sauce" (222). Adding to the dream-like atmosphere of these reminiscences, the narrative voice relates how the Swede "believed that he could remember sitting in his father's lap while Lou Levov sampled a glass of the family's homemade wine" (222). However, this ritual of cultural appreciation or "sampling" involves an important division of labour that runs counter to the prevailing narrative tone of nostalgic

harmony. It is explained that, as Lou drank wine, “a cutter said to be a hundred years old who was supposed to have made gloves for the queen of Italy smoothed the ends of a trank with half a dozen twists of his knife’s dull blade” (222). While the Swede – both as remembering adult and mesmerised child – fascinates over the relationship between skilled work and the sense of cultural reproduction that connects it to European antiquity, it is an unnamed other who carries out the physical act of labour. Divorced from its material context in this fashion, the cultural life attached to the cottage industry of artisan immigrants becomes anecdotal and invested with an unspecified idea of ‘pastness’ by the Swede. The Italian immigrant past and its history of artisan work are thus transformed into a sentimental and de-materialised spectacle by the Swede. Such a reifying process is inextricably linked to the appropriation of labour that takes place in the relationship between the nascent industry of Newark Maid and its earliest glove producers. Throughout the novel, the adult Swede expresses his continuing love and respect for the older work practices of the skilled ethnic labourers that he encountered in the Down Neck area, boasting a sense of seamless continuity between this artisan tradition and the work carried out at his factory. Yet in the same instance, the material pressures exerted upon small scale production that are brought about by the growth of Newark Maid – its centralisation of the ownership of labour and capital – can be traced in the manner by which the Swede has re-appropriated as his own (nostalgic) property the cultural history of artisan producers.

Significantly, the Swede’s recollections of the skilled work practices that he witnesses in Down Neck are far more exact and precise than his “vague memories” about life in the Italian home. At one particular stage, the narrative describes how his father had encouraged him to concentrate on the fine details of the work being carried out by immigrant craftsmen:

> Watch him, Seymour. See how small the skin is? The most difficult thing in the world to cut is a kidskin efficiently. Because its so small. But watch what he does. You’re watching a genius and you’re watching an artist (222)

Again, there is a division of labour involved here between the Swede's role as spectator and the Italian immigrant whose work is being watched. Work is not so much a physical act or struggle for the eagerly watching Lou, but the spectacle of a heroically performing "genius" or "artist." In the instruction to "watch what he does," the Swede is not being taught necessarily how to make gloves, but to gaze upon the glove cutter's work as something that he should understand in terms of a valuable intellectual or cultural commodity. In the pages following his memories of the Italian home, the Swede recalls the sheer litany of minutiae involved in the questions and answers sessions between himself and his father regarding the different technical stages of production. Through the fastidious attention to detail that dominates these conversations, Lou invokes in his son an obsession with understanding the specific processes involved in each stage of glove making. The attentive and dutiful Swede shows a great aptitude for reciting the knowledge that he has learned. However, both men's obsessive attention to the details of how gloves are made is somewhat divorced from the material context of work itself, as carried out for them by others. Lou's call for his son to gaze upon the Italian glove cutter at work is an injunction to mentally record and appropriate knowledge of the skilled practices involved. It is only by attaining such knowledge that he can ensure intellectual ownership over the labour that he buys and the product that is being produced.

The financial value of this mode of intellectual property is highlighted by how the burgeoning success of Newark Maid in the '30s depended upon Lou's first-hand knowledge of what constitutes a good skin and a well cut glove. By the later factory stage, Lou – situating his manager's desk in the middle of the production floor – is ready at hand to fix sewing machines, while at the same time inspect the quality and economy of the glove cutters' output. In the mid '90s, the Swede laments the loss of such trade knowledge among those "business people" who know how to order and sell a glove, but who "don't know the details on how to get it done" (27). While evincing a certain pride in his own familiarity with the practices and traditions of glove making, these excoriating remarks are primarily made by the Swede as an indictment of certain companies whose flagrant examples of misinformed purchasing have had palpable

effects upon their profits. The extent to which the labour of others becomes appropriated as a form of intellectual capital is made particularly evident by how workers themselves are made surplus to production requirements. The glorified image that the Swede conjures of immigrant Italian leather workers is undercut by the implications of his remark that of those "people from Naples who had been glovers in the old country" it was only "the best ... [who] wound up working in Newark Maid's first home" (221). At a later stage of global capital, workers at Newark Maid are shown to be even more dispensable as manufacturing skills become transferable to cheaper manpower abroad. The Swede explains to Zuckerman in the early stages of the novel how he had "trained a lot of good people" in Porto Rico, "people who could give him what Newark Maid had demanded in quality going back to his father's days" (27-8). The appropriation of artisan labour as intellectual property is the foundation not only of Newark Maid's successful expansion, but of Lou and the Swede's historical sense of themselves as hard working and direct producers, rather than the owners of capital. At the same time, this process also marks the genesis of Newark's eventual ruin as a place of industrial production by turning artisan labour into a form of capital that can be purchased anywhere.

The mode of cultural-intellectual appropriation that accompanies Newark Maid's ownership of artisan labour is nowhere more evident than in the tour of the factory that the Swede gives to Rita Cohen. Unaware of Rita's covert role as Merry's political emissary, the Swede takes her through each stage of production in the process of making her a pair of perfect fitting gloves. Along the way, he extols the harmonious relationship between capitalised labour and artisan workmanship at Newark Maid. Yet although he attempts to present the factory as a monument to the antiquity of leather craft work, the various stages of assembly-line production that the Swede takes Rita through are witness to a fundamental sense of discontinuity with the artisan past. Throughout the tour, the sense of material-cultural tradition that he has learned to identify with glove making from his father is transformed by the Swede's panegyric into a de-materialised object of nostalgic fantasy. What is dialogically expressed in this process of reification, I will

outline, is the sudden and traumatic decline of that very history of material practices which the Swede claims to perpetuate at Newark Maid.

With great pride and affection, the Swede describes to Rita how his factory has maintained an uninterrupted connection with the ancient European traditions of glove making. “This cutting room is one of the last in this hemisphere,” he informs her, explaining that “[n]obody cuts gloves this way anymore ... except maybe in a little family-run shop in Naples or Grenoble” (127). Yet despite such claims to perpetuity, the colonisation of work and its traditions by capital at Newark Maid is evidenced in certain childhood memories that regularly punctuate the Swede’s tour of the factory. In one such moment, he recalls his boyhood fascination for “the old European cutters [who] came to work identically dressed in three-piece suits” (125). It is his undiminished sense of this giddy excitement that he experienced as a boy for artisan practices which has bolstered the adult Swede’s stern veneration for the past. At one stage, the narrative recalls the secret boyhood pleasure with which he “press[ed] the concavity of his cheek against the concavity of the wood” of the cutting table that had been “worked smooth over the year from all the animal skins stretched across it and pulled to length” (126). Elsewhere, we are told how “he liked to go and stand” upon the “blurry line of footprints worn into the wood floor where the men stood all day at the cutting tables” (126). The young Swede’s desire to feel with his own body the physical marks that years of labour have indented on the factory space reflects his early obsession with the material and corporeal aspects of work. However, it is not any intimate awareness of the physical hardships or material struggles of the work being done that so fascinates the Swede in such instances, but more so the abstracted and reified signs of its leftover traces. As I will further illustrate below, the labour of others serves in similar ways throughout the novel as an alluring fetish object to which the adult Swede continues to direct his child-like sense of wonder and excitement.

This sense of work as a play-thing for the Swede’s infantile pleasure finds contrast with the masculine sense of independence that he associates with artisan

production. Once again recalling his time spent in the factory as a very young man, the narrative informs us how:

> Watching the cutters, he knew that they were the elite and that they knew it and the boss knew it. Though they considered themselves to be more aristocratic than anyone around, including the boss, a cutter's working hand was proudly calloused from cutting with his big, heavy shears. Beneath those white shirts were arms and chests and shoulders full of a workingman's strength - powerful they had to be, to pull and pull on leather all their lives, to squeeze out of every skin every inch of leather there was (126)

This passage summons an appealing image of masculinity that firmly imprinted itself upon the young Swede. He tells Rita that the cutting room is "the place where he believed he'd grown from a boy into a man" (125). However, the Swede absorbs this spectacle of manhood at the very moment that artisan craftsmanship is being emasculated as manual factory labour. The shared but unspoken knowledge between factory owner and worker of the latter's "elite" status is one that is qualified by the understanding of who is the actual "boss." There is indicated here a momentous stage of transition in the mode of production, whereby glove making has gone from being the unique skill of independent producers to the mass produced output of the dependent wage worker. It is a traumatic shift that is unconsciously known by all involved – "they knew it and the boss knew it" – but which is never given outright acknowledgment. The celebration of the masculine qualities of cutting room work in the above passage suggests a déclassé movement of production from being a rarefied skill to an intensified labour, in which the economic imperative to make use of "every inch of leather there was" demands a brute sense of "workingman's strength." The calloused hands of the men tell of their struggle with "big, heavy shears" that contrast sharply with the "spud knife ... brought from Italy" (221) used by the domestic immigrant labourers that the Swede recalls from an earlier time. These physical hardships of factory work (note how the floor is worn by standing, whereas domestic production takes place in a more relaxed family atmosphere of cooking and homemade wine) go unrecorded by the Swede's description of this form of labour as heroically masculine.

The emasculation of artisan work involved in Newark Maid's expansion is underlined by the Swede's recollections of Lou as the "insufferable boss" (118) who strove to ensure that production was kept to an optimum. Under Lou's employment, workers are turned into incorrigible children who need the constant supervision of a stern father. He is described as having gone about with fastidious skill in uncovering anyone who was "cheating him on the yield" or "robbing him blind" (119). This infantilising process is hastened by Lou's growing monopoly over the traditional practices of leather craft, according to which "fathers passed the secrets on to the son along with all the history and all the lore" (121). The Swede recalls how this mode of transmitting skilled knowledge was perpetuated by the fact that "old Italian cutters would train their sons and no one else" (121). Realising that "every word of every sentence uttered by him he had heard from his father's mouth," the Swede sees his narration of manufacturing processes to Rita in terms of this artisan code in which "the father as the authority was unopposed" (121). However, as factory "boss," Lou has hegemony over the "secrets" and "lore" that once perpetuated the family-based customs of artisan work, precipitating a sudden decline in this father and son tradition.

In the Swede's narrative tour of the factory, therefore, artisan workers are shown as having been displaced from a position of patriarchal authority to one of wage dependence in which they no longer possess the material, intellectual or cultural property of their labour. This sense of dislocation is evidenced by the fact that it is the Swede who narrates all the various processes of production, their specialised techniques and connection to historical memory. An example of this division of labour between work processes and their ownership as narrated knowledge or cultural memory is made clear in the tour given to Rita by the relationship between the Swede and the old glove cutter, Harry. Described as "the Master", Harry is the "oldest of them all" (125); the last of the sons of immigrant artisans who went to work at Newark Maid. As Harry works in silence, it is the Swede who excitedly parades to Rita the detailed intricacies of the task being carried out. Harry is described as "working at it with a ruler and shears all the time that the Swede was telling her just who this master was" (125). Having been himself

taught how to cut gloves from Harry, the Swede explains how the precious knowledge of this "demanding teacher" (128) was coveted by the young boys of the Newark immigrant neighbourhoods. Harry, we are told through the Swede's paraphrase, declined such requests to learn from "the Master" as unprofitable and futile, considering "how much time and leather you're going to destroy till you get to the point where you can make the minimum wage" (128). Absorbed into the Swede's narrative voice, Harry's story serves to foreground the rarefied value of his "Master" status, rather than highlight how the work that he carries out has been de-valued as a form of "minimum wage" labour. Harry is not only usurped as the patriarchal conveyor of knowledge, but his role as "Master" narrator of that historical displacement has also been appropriated by the Swede. Harry's disempowerment as an inheritor (son) and transmitter (father) of knowledge in the patri-linear tradition of glove making is symbolised by his aural and oral impairments. Wearing "a hearing aid" (125), he is practically muted by the Swede's garrulous urge to narrate the different stages of work for Rita. For example, it is the Swede, not Harry, who relays to Rita a tale about Harry's father making a pair of gloves measured to fit the "tall man" of a visiting Barnum and Bailey circus. When the Swede turns to the worker for confirmation of the story's events, we are told that "Harry nodded … without stopping his work" (128). The division of labour is made explicit here: while Harry toils, the Swede vocalises the family "lore" attached to his work.

As I have tried to illustrate, the Swede's narrative tour of Newark Maid reveals a system of labour capitalisation in which the material processes of skilled artisanship are abstracted and appropriated as an intellectual and cultural commodity by the factory owners. In many ways, the Swede's descriptions of work at Newark Maid are less a pedagogical lesson in glove making than an instruction in how to acquire narrative-intellectual ownership of the work processes involved. Having been made to work at each stage of glove making for six months by his father so that he can learn "the old-fashioned way" (127), the Swede does have a somewhat primary experience of work itself. However, this fast-track induction into the artisan tradition has greater significance as part of the enduring education, instilled in him by Lou, through which he

will know his product as narrated knowledge rather than as material labour. In this way, the Swede is not just having a glove made for Rita as he shows her through the factory, but is also constructing a particular way of relating that process. What the Swede's translation of work into anecdotal story telling and rarefied pedagogy achieves is to elide the material situation by which artisan production and its cultural traditions have been degraded by the factory system.

This reification of material labour as nostalgic commodity is further symbolised by the emphasis that Lou's puts upon the importance of "a good skin" (221) - knowing how to source, treat and cut one – in making leather gloves. Described at one stage as "lovingly kneading the kidskin between his fingertips" (221), Lou's fascination with the materiality of his product finds metaphoric extension in his and, in particular, the Swede's obsession with surfaces and forms of exteriority. As one who has an "inability to draw conclusions about anything but exteriors," the Swede is described by Zuckerman as displaying no sense of an interior life or "substratum" (20) that might contradict his outward veneer of success and happiness. In as much as a "good skin" is essential to making quality leather gloves, therefore, it also finds significance in the Swede's illustrious notions of family and business. This preoccupation with a perfected skin is exemplified by the Swede's description of Dawn's face-lift as the "heroic reconstruction," which "[e]rased all that suffering" (298) caused by Merry's bomb. Elsewhere, Rita carries out a tirade against what she sees as the Swede's facade of sterile bourgeois norms: "all you really fucking care about is skin … what's underneath, you don't have a clue" (137). Skins and surfaces, therefore, hold an important function in the Swede's pastoral self-concept, in which life is made perfectible and certain traumas – "what's underneath" – remain submerged. In this sense, the various material processes described in transforming a raw skin into a fine product act as a metaphor for the way that Newark Maid has re-moulded the traumatic contestations between work and capital into a cohesive and marketable narrative. In learning about the final stages of glove manufacturing, the Swede is taught by both of his parents how to detect the almost traceless occurrence of a "skipped stitch [that] can turn into an open seam" (223). This

desire for seamless continuity is reflected in the Swede's narrative glorification of how traditional artisan values are upheld at Newark Maid. The metaphoric connection between the stitching of seams and the Swede's pastoral narrative finds further extension in his explanation to Rita of the "precise calculation" of "an exactly measured amount of hidden stretch left in the width" (132), which ensures that the glove will fit perfectly. The Swede's liberal-pastoral ideology of the "vital center" also contains a "hidden stretch," by which it seeks to assimilate various forms of tension – whether it is the early radicalism of his daughter or the resistance of artisan tradition to factory labour – into its supple notion of balance and compromise. Yet having been made subject to various crippling setbacks by the novel's end, the Swede begins to realise that he can no longer sustain this symbolic connection between the valued commodity that he sells and his perfectly packaged life: "only now did he look prepared to believe that manufacturing a superb ladies' dress glove in quarter sizes did not guarantee the making of a life that would fit to perfection everyone he had loved" (421).

The Swede's translation of material work into narrative property is further significant in the way that it is linked to Zuckerman's concern with writing as a form of artistic labour. In a review of *American Pastoral* for *Time Magazine*, R. Z. Sheppard has underlined what he sees as the connection between Roth's detailed attention to the skilled production of leather gloves in the novel and his well-honed literary style:

> The one character who most resembles Roth is a quiet Master leather cutter, 40 years at Newark Maid, who lets his scissors do the talking. *American Pastoral*, too, fits like a glove (74)

In Sheppard's argument, there is no sense of the divide existing between work and who owns it – the root cause of why Harry, the "Master," remains so "quiet" – in Roth's novel. Ignoring the dialogic tension between narrator and protagonist, he treads a linear path between the Swede's exalted notion of artisan labour and what he presumes to be Roth's solemn idea of the literary artist as master craftsman. I would argue that Roth does draw certain important connections between the skilled customs of glove making and Zuckerman's work as literary author in the novel. However, such parallels are not

based upon rarefied notions of craft and tradition, as espoused in the Swede's mythic idea of the work that is carried out at Newark Maid. Instead, I would suggest that glove manufacturing and fiction writing in *American Pastoral* are both subject to a shared sense of displacement from inherited forms of knowledge and codes of practice. These discontinuities within both artisan and literary traditions are located in the novel by a certain crisis of the 'real.'

Just as the Swede's pastoral narrative has transformed traditional notions of artisan labour into a de-materialised commodity, Zuckerman's "realistic chronicle" of events is also somewhat denuded of "the substantiality of the real thing." This absence of a sense of what is 'real' in both the Swede's concept of glove making and Zuckerman's literary narrative involves for each labour a certain traumatic break with past traditions. The ascetic isolation that Zuckerman has undertaken in the American trilogy is intended, he explains, as a means of escaping the personal and professional agonies caused by the way in which our narrative claims upon life are always "wrong" and subject to bitter dispute. Carried out in emulation of Lonoff, such capacity for self-denial invokes a high-formalist notion of aesthetic tradition in which the writer's personal removal from the experiences that he narrates allows for a degree of disinterested objectivity toward and mastery over his subject matter. In many ways, it is to this masterful notion of authorship that Sheppard's description of Roth as craftsman appeals. However, although Zuckerman claims in *American Pastoral* that "[c]ertain problems have been taken out of my life" (63) by his determination to live alone in the woods as the un-distracted and "single-minded writer" (64), the various conflicts and crises which have previously marked his life as an author continue to find a form of scrutiny through his narrative detailing of the Swede's story. By writing about how the Swede's world of "supposedly robust things" (423) – such as his materialist concepts of work and masculinity – is made subject to a harrowing experience of traumatic "*unreality*" (134), Zuckerman finds a displaced means of exploring the aesthetic and autobiographical crises that have marked his own troubled relationship to the 'real' world. As my previous two chapters have indicated, Zuckerman's "redface" style of

writing is at odds with both high-formalist ("paleface") and more historically engaged realist ("redskin") notions of literary tradition. Similar to the way in which the sense of a material connection to the past in the Swede's narrative of work and industrial production is shorn of any 'real' foundations, Zuckerman's splintered relationship to these somewhat competing traditions stems from his experience of a world in which any concrete notion of the "facts" is constantly made ungraspable and unreliable. The narrative of artisan labour as disinherited of its materialist sense of tradition by the Levov family business, therefore, proves a suitable example of how Zuckerman rehearses the agonising self-divisions caused by his own past struggles to wield authorial control over the incorrigible phenomena of 'real' life. In this sense, Roth's fiction is not something that "fits like a glove," either in *American Pastoral* or elsewhere, but instead calls attention to its creative tensions and flawed seams. In what follows, I will explore further this sense of a shared trauma of the 'real' in Zuckerman and the Swede's lives by looking at ways in which both men's efforts to reinvent their sense of origins have found resistance in the imposing demands of a Jewish father.

Unassimilated Remainders: Racial and Ethnic Exclusion in the Swede's Pastoral

The hastened relocation of Newark's thriving forms of industrial production to factories overseas provides an important context in the novel for the various social and cultural upheavals of the late sixties. Rather than discussing it as an aspect of the aggressive drive toward business expansion, Lou and the Swede make great efforts to explain this sudden dwindling in nascent production in terms of an "erosion of workmanship" (24) among the American labour force. Described by the Swede as a form "of work people don't want to do anymore" (127), the decline of glove making in Newark is deemed by both him and, in particular, his father as having a ruinous effect upon the social binds of patriarchy and family. However, the pulling apart of the social discipline and cohesion wrought by values of "workmanship" can be viewed, as I have shown, in light of how the work of independent producers has been purchased and re-defined by industries such as Newark Maid. By centralising the ownership of labour in

the person of the factory boss, Newark Maid's rise to success has itself brought about a shift in the artisan concept of work as the highly valued property of the worker to one in which labour translates in terms of wages paid and nothing more. Ironically, the Swede complains to Rita about the charlatanism bred by this very notion of wage-work: "[t]oday our economy is such that people take a job here and if something comes along for another fifty cents an hour, they're gone" (127).

What is significant about this lamented decline in a disciplined work ethic is the manner in which it is associated with certain prejudicial images of race in the novel. According to Lou, the African-American workforce that has gradually replaced the remaining European immigrant workers at Newark Maid has helped to foster an environment in which "nobody is doing a day's work and nobody is doing it right" (163). Described by the Swede as a "people who are careless" (218), his African-American labour force represents what he sees as the ultimate degradation of artisan notions of pride in craftsmanship: "the beating we're taking from black people who care nothing any longer about the quality of my product … people who've got me over a barrel because they know there's nobody trainable left in Newark to replace them" (218). Yet despite the Swede's accusations, Roth's text suggests certain ways in which the African-American workers at Newark Maid are being exploited and debased as a source of cheap labour for Newark Maid; the only group "trainable" for an employment that has been gradually emasculated and disinherited of its artisan sense of "workmanship." As a result of such dramatic changes in how work is valued, it is only the Swede who can still afford to indulge in nostalgia for glove making's "long, long history" as the source of "a love and a legacy [necessary] to motivate somebody to stay in a business like this" (130).

Lou and the Swede's descriptions of race invoke some of the classic racial stereotypes of the slaveholding ideology of "paternalism." As the dominant means for explaining and defending chattel slavery in nineteenth century America, the discourse of paternalism described African-American slaves as the hapless, indolent and childlike

charges of their more capable white owners. It claimed that, due to the passive and emasculated characteristics of the racial subject, slaveholders were morally obliged to act as patriarchal benefactors in providing for the material and spiritual welfare of their slaves.[27] Totally severed from any ties to the patriarchal tradition of artisan glove making, African-American workers at Newark Maid are considered in childlike terms by both Lou and the Swede. As factory owner, Lou is cast as the Ur-father who provides for his dependent charges: "I don't want you complaining to anybody but me, here at this desk isn't just a boss, here is your ally, your buddy, your friend" (164). As in the paternalist construction of slavery, the property owner is presented here as a benevolent patron, rather than as the beneficiary of other people's labour. The Swede underlines this idea of a moral relationship between factory owner and his African-American labour force by explaining how his initial reluctance to move production away from Newark following the race riots of the late sixties was derived from a sense "of duty to long-standing employees, most of whom were black" (24). When discussing "the black forelady, Vicky" (161), he conjures a paternalist stereotype of the obedient and loyal African-American who evinces a complete sense of satisfaction with her assigned role in the racial power structure. The Swede's sense of the benign relationship between himself and his African-American employees acts as a significant counter in the novel to Merry's argument that "Newark's just a black colony for my own father" (165). In support of this viewpoint, the Swede describes the "old and lasting relationship" between the Levov family and Vicky, whose "devotion to Newark Maid was no less than his" (162). This sense of shared vested interests between them both is epitomised

[27] Peter Kolchin has provided a useful discussion on the development of this paternalist sensibility in the antebellum South among practitioners and defenders of slavery "who sought to demonstrate, both to themselves and to outside critics, its basic humaneness (and hence its defencsibility)" (94). According to Kolchin, paternalism gave rise to a particular form of rhetoric and thought, through which: "Masters saw their slaves not just as their laborers but also as their 'people,' inferior members of their extended households from whom they expected work and obedience but to whom they owed guidance and protection … They spoke frequently of their 'love' for their slaves, and although such assertions contained considerable hyperbole, they also expressed the very real conviction that there was more to slavery than profit and loss" (112). Elsewhere, Eugene Genovese offers a more succinct explanation of how "Paternalism defined the involuntary labor of the slaves as a legitimate return to their masters for protection and direction" (5).

by Vicky's faithful decision to "not desert him" (162) during the Swede's efforts to protect the factory from looting and destruction amid the race riots of '67.

This reassuring image of the loyal worker is contrasted with a more fearful notion of the African-American subject as an incorrigible and ungrateful child in the novel. Lou and the Swede's horror at this perceived sense of childlike disgruntlement and petulant disobedience among their African-American employees recalls certain historical anxieties lurking within the benign paternalist myth of relations between slaveholder and slave.[28] For instance, the Swede describes at one stage how: "the quality of the Newark Maid line began to fall off because of negligence and indifference on the part of his employees, a marked decline in workmanship that had the effect of sabotage even if he couldn't call it that" (163). In this context, the African-American subject no longer fulfils the desirable image of the contented child, but acts as an unknown and potentially subversive quantity. The narrative's description of the Newark riots in terms of cataclysmic racial insubordination provides a particularly heightened example of the anxieties that are caused by this contradiction within the paternalist stereotype. In his angry reaction to the riots, for example, Lou acts as the unappreciated and usurped father whose tireless sacrifices have served little purpose: "they took that city and now they are going to take that business and everything that I built up a day at a time, an *inch* at a time, and now they are going to leave it *all* in ruins!" (163-4). The disturbing ambivalence that Lou and the Swede experience in attempting to position their African-American workers as either loyal employees or "careless" saboteurs is rooted in prejudicial notions of the racial subject as childlike and irresponsible. The decline in "workmanship" that the Swede cites as integral to the removal of Newark Maid's production to overseas is cast in terms of certain stock clichés of a racial deficiency and

[28] Kolchin also discusses how the varying degrees "in which Southern slaves resisted their thraldom" (155) helped to render vulnerable the paternalist romance of race relations during slavery. He explains how these rebellious acts varied in degree from daily acts of passive or "silent sabotage" (157) to less frequent moments of outright, physical resistance. As the main text of my argument suggests, these troubling and often unreadable (because "silent" or covert) forms of disloyalty to the slaveowner are reflected in the Swede and Lou's growing frustrations with how their African-American employees in *American Pastoral* fail to uphold values of patriarchal authority and workmanship.

ineptitude that exists among his African-American workforce. Yet as I have shown, the process of decline in American manufacturing that the Levov's bemoan is one that is instigated by Newark Maid's appropriation of artisan labour. In this sense, African-Americans do not subvert tradition or bring about a radical defilement of the masculine values of work and social responsibility in *American Pastoral*. By contrast, as non-propertied and low-paid wage workers, they themselves have been infantilised by the paternalist language that Lou and the Swede use to describe the relationship between labour and capital ownership.

The apocalyptic sense of social and industrial devastation that accompanies the Newark riots in Roth's novel mark a horrifying return of certain repressed traumas of racial and socio-economic disaffection that have been ignored by the Swede's paternalist-pastoral outlook. What gives added significance to this experience of racial/worker unrest is the manner in which it speaks to the Swede's own concealed trauma as a Jewish-American subject. The initial growth of capital within Newark Maid, as I have indicated, has involved an erosion of work traditions among Italian and German immigrants. This unexplored process of ethnic deracination is mirrored by the Swede's own pastoral sense of American origins. Rejecting the language of vulnerable Jewish marginality that finds repeated expression through his father, the Swede sees himself as being "like some frontiersman of old" (310) in his desire to "own a piece of America" (315). He thus abandons any knowledge of Jewish social exclusion that he inherits from Lou, drawing a new and self-determining concept of identity from archetypal notions of America as a bountiful agrarian pastoral. Nowhere is this better exemplified for the Swede than in the mythic figure of Johnny Appleseed, with whom he comes to identify. Perhaps the most marked symbol of pastoral fertility in the novel, Appleseed represents for the Swede an exuberantly "happy American" who expresses his "spontaneous affection for the landscape" by scattering his "bag of seeds" (316) everywhere that he strides. In spite of his father's warning that Old Rimrock "is a narrow, bigoted area" (309), the Swede is determined to embrace it as a fertile setting for

his scene of a pastoral America in which "there is no need for that resentment stuff from anybody" (311).

Yet despite his compensatory idea of a post-ethnic America, the Swede is eventually forced to re-visit an older trauma of Jewish historical exclusion from the mainstream culture. A particularly notable example of the Swede's growing sense of his Jewish ancestry occurs on the tour of Old Rimrock's Revolutionary history that he is taken on by William Orcutt. As a man who knew "all too well just how far back he and his manners reached into the genteel past" (302), Orcutt's august lineage marks out the limits of the Swede's sense of American origins. Although he professes to not understand the "class sting" (301) that his Irish-American wife, Dawn, feels in the company of Orcutt, the Swede soon begins to show an awareness of the significant gap between both his and the other man's genealogy: "[e]very rung into America for the Levovs there was another rung to attain; this guy was *there*" (306). The far-reaching extent of Orcutt's "genteel" lineage underlines certain unexposed experiences of ethnic exclusion and resentment within the Swede's apparent "unconscious oneness with America." The Swede finds that, in the company of Orcutt, "[h]e couldn't remember ever in his life feeling more like his father – not like his father's son but like his *father*" (306). In a manner that suggests the delayed recurrence of a previously unacknowledged trauma, the Swede is made acquainted with a wounded sense of Jewish historical marginality – the experience of his father – that had been otherwise unfamiliar to him prior to this moment. This growing sensitivity to his Jewish origins is made further evident when an old school pal, Bucky Robinson, enumerates for Orcutt the Swede's personal history of athletic success: "seeing everything he would ordinarily prefer to hide behind a modest demeanor being revealed so passionately to Orcutt by Bucky was more pleasurable than he might have imagined, almost like the satisfaction of a desire he personally knew nothing about – a desire for revenge" (312). The Swede's overwhelming urge to act upon "a desire he personally knew nothing about" in this instance mirrors the paradoxical notion of trauma as something that is unregistered to the

conscious mind, and yet which appears uncannily familiar at the same time. Earlier in the novel Zuckerman had begged the question of the Swede:

> Where was the Jew in him? You couldn't find it and yet you knew it was there. Where was the irrationality in him? (20)

Yet despite "[a]ll that he had eliminated to achieve his perfection," the "striving" and "ambivalence" (20) which Zuckerman associates with the hyphenated experience of Jewish-Americans find hidden traces in the growing sense of incompleteness and anger that the Swede experiences in the company of Orcutt.

Filial Disobedience: Paternity and Masculinity in Crisis

The Swede's determination to abandon his Jewish heritage involves a trauma that he is forced to agonisingly re-live in ways other than this latent hostility to Orcutt. In rejecting his ethnic past, the Swede commits an act of transgression against his father's authority that is re-visited through a broader crisis of masculinity and paternity in Roth's novel. At one stage of the novel, the Swede begins to contemplate how his daughter's political violence may have originated in his own decision to defy his father's warning by marrying Dawn, a Catholic woman. Recalling a "secret baptism" (390) for Merry that was carried out against the stern caveats of his father, the Swede ponders how this moment of filial disobedience may have instigated his family's tragic plight: "[p]erhaps everything bad that *ever* happened to Merry, not excluding the *worst* thing that happened to her, had originated then and there" (390). There is an absurdly superstitious element to this thought that Merry's New Left extremism might be linked back to her baptism as a Catholic. However, this passage establishes a symbolic connection between the Swede's aberration of the law of the father and his own loss of paternal authority over his daughter. Merry's act of terrorism is explained in this instance as an unconscious repetition of an earlier trauma of inconceivable transgression or departure. This connection between the Swede's defiance of his father and the chaos that later shatters his pastoral sense of family and home forms part of a broader theme in *American*

Pastoral, which links the social unrest and moral permissiveness of the sixties to a rapid decline in patriarchal authority. As I have already indicated, the Swede perceives the growing laxity and ill-discipline among his African-American workers as a childlike disregard for inherited codes of patriarchal authority and "workmanship." He finds further horror at this inversion of filial loyalty in the New Left rhetoric of Rita, which he describes as an expression of "infantile egoism" and "Kid Mayhem" (146). During the dinner party discussion on the popularisation and widespread release of the pornographic movie, *Deep Throat*, Lou climaxes his long and meandering tirade on the connection between the decline in American industry and the rise in social disorder and public immorality by stating: "[l]et me tell you who goes to those movies: riffraff, bums and, kids without adult supervision" (350).

The decline in paternal authority and social cohesion that Lou so despondently outlines, however, can also be attributed to the assault on masculinity and tradition which is carried out at Newark Maid. The history of Newark Maid is scattered with tensions between an artisan ideal of masculinity and capitalist processes of emasculated or infantilised labour that find embodiment in the Swede's growing sense of self-division in the novel. As I have suggested earlier, the lessons in manhood that the Swede recalls learning on the factory floor and through the instruction of his father are ambiguously framed by his child-like fascination for the responsibilities of work and fatherhood. Throughout the novel, his pastoral outlook appears to assume a level of infantile fantasy that runs counter to his self-image as someone who was "fully charged up with purpose … with a grown man's aims and ambitions" (192). The Swede's "rage to be 'mature'" (192) as an adolescent spawned for him day-dreams of becoming a responsible husband and father. In a pre-emptive counter to the possibility that such projected "yearnings" might be considered as those of "a child, vain and spoiled," the Swede reasons to himself: "[i]f he was a child, it was only insofar as he found himself looking ahead into responsible manhood with the longing of a kid gazing into a candy-store window" (192). This paradoxical collocation of "responsible manhood" and child-like fantasy is further highlighted by the Swede's longing to return, following the trauma

of Merry's bomb, to the "*once upon a time*, back when the union of beautiful mother and strong father and bright, bubbly child rivalled the trinity of the three bears" (413). This fairytale sense of pastoral romance is also located by the Swede's identification with the myth of Johnny Appleseed, described by him as "one of those kid things you keep in your mind no matter how old you get" (315). What these various examples help to demonstrate is how Lou's heavily weighted notion of masculinity, when passed onto the Swede, eventually undergoes a similar crisis of emasculation and infantilism to that which the workers at Newark Maid have had to endure.

The Swede's rather infantile view of manhood involves a repressive ideal of Dawn as both homemaker and beauty queen. The narrative explains how his adolescent ambition about one day fathering a daughter was accompanied by a vision of "the child's adoring mother … standing by the stove, preparing their dinner" (190). This construction of ideal femininity is eventually torn asunder by Dawn, who recalls with outrage their earlier courtship when she was Miss New Jersey:

> You wouldn't leave me be! Every time I looked up, there was my boyfriend, gaga because I was some ridiculous beauty queen! You were like some *kid!* You had to make me into a *princess* (178)

The Swede's desire to play the responsible and caring patriarch finds an even greater sense of failure in his inability to assert paternal control over Merry. As an only daughter, Merry signals an awkward gap in the patri-linear notions of work and manhood that he espouses. In his role as her father, the Swede is incapable of providing Merry with the same sternness of paternal rule that was issued to him by Lou. His reluctance to use force or aggression in dealing with Merry's increasingly extreme behaviour forms part of a broader, largely unconscious, unwillingness by the Swede to adopt the heavy burden of his father's mantel. Unlike Lou, he is not moulded in the same fashion as one of those "rough-hewn," "slum-reared Jewish fathers" (11) of the previous generation. On discovering Dawn's is having a sexual affair with Orcutt, the Swede fantasises about "vaulting his father" (412) and abandoning his appointed role as a patriarch: "[t]hey are dealing now with an irresponsible person … with someone who

does not care" (371). Inextricably tied to his desire to escape the obligations which accompany his firmly conditioned notion of masculinity is a vision that the Swede has of his father's death: "if, as a result, his father dropped dead, well, they'd just have to bury him ... bury him deep in the ground" (369). The Swede expresses here his unconscious desire to "bury" his father and, thereby, free himself of the weight of inherited expectations. *American Pastoral* dramatises the Swede's struggle between being a son and a father; an irresponsible, dreaming child and a sober, duty-bound man. Trapped between the demanding paternal authority of Lou and the violent filial rejection of Merry, the Swede is traumatised by an inability to uphold the patriarchal line of succession in his roles as both son and father:

> Birth, succession, the generations, history - utterly improbable. He had seen that we *don't* come from one another, that it only appears that we come from one another (418)

Timothy Parrish argues that the crisis of paternity involved in the Swede's refusal to heed Lou's counsel results in the tragedy which blights his post-ethnic pastoral. For Parrish, the punishment meted out to the Swede as a result of this aberration of the law of the father reflects Zuckerman's sorrow and guilt over his own disavowal of Jewish origins in earlier novels. According to him, both the Swede and, to an even greater extent, Merry are depicted as hopelessly stranded in the novel from the historically grounded sense of identity that originates from Lou, the Jewish Ur-father. Their barren, rootless attempts at self-transformation in the novel, he claims, mirror Zuckerman's ultimately doomed and costly efforts to reject his origins and create the self anew: "[a]fter years of writing art that rebels against the father and the version of Jewish identity he represents, Zuckerman's narrative performances give way here to Swede's exhaustion of identity" (2005b, 147). In reading *American Pastoral* thus, Parrish suggests "that Roth in his late phase is distancing himself from the postmodern decentering of the self that has been one of the hallmarks of his fiction" (140).

I would partially agree with Parrish's argument. Roth most definitely does explore the anguished experience of trauma in Zuckerman's conflicted sense of origins

through the story of the Swede. However, *American Pastoral* does not involve a simple restoration of the father as a corrective to the postmodern "exhaustion of identity" in earlier Zuckerman novels. In my last two chapters, I have discussed how questions of the father, the 'real' or origin throughout Roth's fiction have been subject to a paradoxical mixture of rejection and fidelity, departure and return. The code of the father as an externally authoring or originating presence is indeed challenged and subject to artistic reinvention by Zuckerman and other figures in Roth's work. As I have indicated elsewhere, however, the 'betrayed' or transgressed authority of the father continues to maintain a certain residual influence on these characters. For instance, Zuckerman's constant mining of his original fallout with his father throughout his writing suggests the manner in which this unremitting conflict or trauma has both drawn him away from and back towards the paternal source or origin. As a result of this persistent antagonism with the father and other external embodiments of the 'real' in Roth's fiction, it cannot be suggested that his work has involved an outright "postmodern decentering" of notions of referential origin in favour of unbounded acts of creative (self-) transformation. *American Pastoral* does not significantly re-evaluate these tensions between self-authorship and paternal authority, but continues to explore their creative implications within a broader context of Zuckerman's sense of national origins in post-war America. By examining how the Swede's unconscious desire to shed himself of his father's overbearing influence clashes with his ideal of "responsible manhood," I would suggest that Zuckerman finds a means of re-tracing the unfinished sense of traumatic conflict at the heart of his own life as both a man and author. Zuckerman's narrative remarks upon the Swede's growing awareness of the actual rift between him and the father to whom he had always been so loyal suitably highlight these correlations in the lives of both Roth's narrator and protagonist: "[o]pposing the father is no picnic and not opposing the father is no picnic – that's what he was beginning to discover" (387).

In ways that resemble Parrish's argument, Hutchinson finds in this novel a somewhat uncomplicated restoration of the father, ignoring what I would argue is the more fissured and contradictory experience of origins that lies at the heart of Roth's

fiction. As I have already noted, he sees *American Pastoral* as a lament for the "robust New Deal liberalism of the father" over the "weak" and "devitalised" adaptation of such political values by the son. Lou's enraged outbursts against both the Nixonian Right and the New Left inspired upheavals of the sixties in the novel are cited by Hutchinson as evidence of his support for the greater "majoritarian emphasis" (126) of the New Deal. According to Hutchinson, Lou's traditionalist views on the relationship between manufacturing and social cohesion in America reveal his virile commitment to a broader public vision over the more privatised longings of the Swede, who, "enfolded away in pastoral isolation" (135), represents an emasculated liberal "politics of disengagement" (126). He contends that the Swede is far too passive to effectively confront the challenges which Merry and her generation pose to progressive liberal ideas about the shared community of interests that exists among American citizens. By contrast, Lou's "'strong' liberalism champions a morally premised commitment to 'intervention'" (126) in dealing with such a significant threat to the liberal vision of American society as a cooperative commonwealth. Of particular note in Hutchinson's discussion of *American Pastoral* are his comments about how "the subversion of previously stable cultural values" during the sixties "is yet another indicator of broader socio-political crisis" (133) for Lou. He suggests that the nightmarish world of civil disorder and moral disarray lurking within America – no more so evident than in the de-industrialising wasteland of Newark – which Lou so greatly despairs over is "representative of social atomization on a massive scale" (133). As the ultimate source of patriarchal authority in the novel, Lou's appeal to values of "family" and "community" (133) in the face of the widespread social fragmentation that faces America in the sixties thus indicates for Hutchinson the fading cry of an older liberal vision of the common good. However, I would argue that rather than being evocative of the Rooseveltian sense of civic spirit that prevailed prior to the late sixties, Lou's comments upon how the decline of industry in Newark has led to steep levels of social decay and moral laxity appear to be far more consonant with the new conservative attitudes toward culture and economy which began to emerge during this period.

As I have already indicated, Lou offers a broad assessment of how a collapse in once sturdy values of "workmanship" and patriarchy among Americans, with all their attendant emphasis upon social responsibility, lie at the root of the economic and moral torpor which has so devastated Newark. This narrative of gross cultural decline elides the causal relationship that I have been showing exists between the aggressive pursuit of his family's business interests and the social malaise that so upsets Lou. The "litany" of [t]axes, corruption, and race" (24) that he repeats at different intervals in the novel in order to explain why manufacturing vanished so rapidly from Newark is indicative of Lou's overall determination to exculpate his own role as a baron of industry from any responsibility for the unexpected changes that occurred in social life during the sixties. Not only is his indictment of taxes typical of rightist economic arguments against Federal measures for re-distributing the private wealth of businesses, but his despairing attitude toward the subject of race in the novel fails, as I have already pointed out, to show any progressive understanding of the relationship between socio-economic disenfranchisement and racial divisions in America. Rather than explaining the swift de-industrialisation of Newark and the catastrophic upheavals that accompany it in terms of specific economic motives for profit, Lou blames such events on a perceived decline in social authority and the reluctance of the national government to adapt quicker to the needs of industry. Such an explanation of the social divisions caused by the changing industrial landscape of Newark in exclusive terms of eroding cultural values and government restrictions on capital is clearly resonant of the New Right ethos that I have outlined earlier in this chapter.

Lou's markedly rightist attitude finds further evidence in his efforts to explain the financial need for industries to leave Newark and avail of cheaper labour abroad during this period. Presenting business as some form of unwitting victim to changing social and economic conditions, he unapologetically defends the necessity for tearing apart of the New Deal and liberal consensus spirit of partnership between manufacturers and labour unions:

> The union rate on piecework ran a lot of people out of business or offshore … Our downfall was that we never could compete with overseas. We hastened it because there wasn't some good judgment on either side. But it could not be saved regardless. The only thing that could have stopped it – and I was not for this, I don't think you can stop world trade and I don't think you should try – but the only thing that could have stopped it is if we put up trade barriers (346)

As Lou points out, the various New Deal accords between labour and capital interests that had provided the foundation for a golden age in American industry – during which Lou's Newark Maid rose to prominence – are subject to strain and eventual collapse, once the exigencies of profit and the demands of unions begin to diverge in the sixties. Although he considers himself to be a firm supporter of Rooseveltian liberalism, Lou responds to these changes in economic conditions by virulently defending key conservative ideas in favour of the free movement of world trade against labour or government efforts to re-organise capitalism. Hutchinson describes Lou as a firm opponent of a New Right philosophy which claimed that, by the late sixties: "values such as self-reliance, the work ethic, and the cult of the 'self-made man' had been undermined by a New Deal order that had outlived its usefulness" (129). However, Lou himself is equally participative in this onslaught against the more regulatory and protective approach to capitalism within progressive liberal thought; what Hutchinson calls its "commitment to 'intervention.'" Lou's somewhat *laissez-faire* attitude toward what he calls "world trade" is complemented by the manner in which his virtuous ideal of disciplined "workmanship" supersedes any broader understanding of the economic and social plight of labour (and race) in the novel. I would argue that Roth's novel thus examines how the problems of the Swede's notion of consensus merely make more pronounced certain contradictions inherent to the progressive values of his father. It is this profound sense of liberalism's failure to wield control over the (socio-economic) forces driving American history that provides an important context to Roth's novel, rather than any sense of restorative nostalgia for the epic heights of the New Deal.

"Nothing lasts, and yet nothing passes": Confronting the Impasse of Race and Ethnicity in *The Human Stain*

In *The Human Stain*, Zuckerman sets out to recount the highly complex biography of his late friend, Coleman Silk. The narrative is, by and large, stimulated by the surprising revelation made to Zuckerman that a grave secret lay at the centre of Coleman's life. While attending the latter's funeral, Zuckerman is made aware that Silk was in fact African-American by birth and that his racial origins had been concealed to the wider world by his single minded decision, made some fifty years earlier, to 'pass' as a white man. This phenomenon of 'passing' is one that has a long history within the African-American experience of slavery and racism.[29] Coleman's determined commitment to disguise himself as white is, from its inception at least, fully consonant with this social tradition. His initial act of passing is made during a post-war period in which American society was still structured hierarchically along racial lines. Silk's sister, Ernestine, makes clear to Zuckerman how "Coleman was a part of his time," explaining that: "[he] couldn't wait to go through civil rights to get to his human rights, and so he skipped a step" (327). However, Zuckerman's brief friendship with Silk develops in the late 1990s when the acutely historical incentives motivating Coleman's efforts to hide his origins have been largely supplanted by the more self-empowering and protective racial categorisations of identity politics. The two men become acquainted following an incident in which the aged Coleman – by now a successful Dean of Greek Classical Literature at Athena College – has been accused of using a pejorative epithet to describe two African-American students whom he has never met and whose racial identities, as a result, are unknown to him. Despite arguing that his use of the word "spooks" was intended as a jocular means of calling into doubt the corporeal existence of two students who had never attended his class, Coleman incurs the zealous

[29]In her essay on *The Human Stain*, Patrice Rankin has mentioned how: "[p]assing is a strong trope, both a historical reality and one of America's most abiding literary motifs" (101). As a novelistic theme, passing finds a rich heritage in such diverse works as Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It is from such literary examples that Roth draws a significant part of his inspiration for *The Human Stain.*

wrath of the politically correct faculty members at Athena College. Having been accused of racism, he departs from his academic post in a pique of rage. Determined to enlist help in writing an autobiography that will prove both a personal defence and a retributive form of vengeance against his accusers, Coleman calls on Zuckerman, the local writer who is himself somewhat in 'hiding' or seclusion from the greater social world.

The damning accusation made against Coleman for his unwitting use of a racist term becomes a focus through which Roth dramatises various tensions in the relationship between race and subjectivity in *The Human Stain*. In contrast to the racially sensitive language of political correctness by which he stands judged, Coleman's earlier act of passing is largely presented by Zuckerman in terms of the liberating possibilities afforded by its self-determining notion of subjectivity. Zuckerman thus explores in Coleman's tangled biography a novel variation on the conflicts between prescribed notions of social origins and acts of self-authorship that have coloured his own life and writing in the past. Unwilling to accept the notion of a degraded racial identity – as it is both assigned by white dominated society and internalised by his African-American environment of family and community – the young Coleman's desire to pass as white finds expression through a universal humanist language that considers the "individual as real apart and beyond the social determinants defining him" (333). By contrast, the code of political correctness that the aged Coleman is deemed to have transgressed is regimented by a heightened awareness of how racial differences mark an unalterable condition of subjectivity. According to Elaine Ginsberg, "both the process and the discourse of passing interrogate the ontology of identity categories and their construction" (4) in such a way that de-legitimises any strict notion of racially determined subjectivity. She suggests that: "[i]n its interrogation of the essentialism that is the foundation of identity politics, passing has the potential to create a space for creative self-determination and agency" (16). In a manner which compares somewhat with Ginsberg's argument, Roth counterpoises the historically disjunctive phenomena of passing and political correctness as a means of dramatising the harried struggle between

creative acts of autogenesis and the notion of an inescapable origin that has defined both Coleman and Zuckerman's personal histories. However, in contrast to how Ginsberg prioritises the values of "creative self-determination" over identity politics, Roth's text finds no clear resolution or synthesis for its dialectical struggle between ideas of self-reinvention and social determinism. I wish to demonstrate how Coleman's desire to create the self anew is placed in dialogic tension with a certain *impassable* trauma of class and race in *The Human Stain*. In turn, I will look at how such a conflict finds important parallels in the life of Roth's narrator. By exploring the complications and limitations involved in Coleman's attempt at self-authorship, I would suggest that Zuckerman finds yet another means of rehearsing the painful conflict involved in his own efforts to reinvent his Jewish origins and, thereby, assert his authorial pre-eminence over influences external to (and competing with) his writing.

By thus examining how various conflicts between notions self-making and socially constructed identity – what Coleman describes as his determined battle not to "let the big they impose its bigotry on you any more than you can let the little they become a we and impose its ethics on you" (108) – operate in the novel, I will explore the manner in which Roth engages with contemporary cultural debates over political correctness and identity politics. As my previous chapter already discusses, certain efforts to regulate how marginal subjectivities are understood and spoken about within contemporary America have helped to somewhat undermine and erode traditional liberal concepts of the shared sense of social and cultural belonging that unites the nation's wide diversity of people. As people like Todd Gitlin and George Packer have helped to outline, the language of commonalities and cultural universality is today being monopolised by more right-wing concepts of the asocial and self-determining individual. *The Human Stain* dramatises certain challenges that the popularised growth of localised notions of cultural difference within American life bring to the more transcendent idea of a shared and inalienable sense of (deracinated) human potential to which Coleman and, to a similar but lesser extent, Zuckerman have each aspired in the past. Roth's novel thus locates itself at the centre of recent tensions between broad encompassing ideas of a

common national polity – as they are separately framed by both Rooseveltian liberalism and the new conservative Right in America – and more recalcitrant notions of how American cultural experience is fragmented and sectionalised according to distinct categories such as race and gender.

Political Correctness and Cultural Divisions in Late-century America

The academic setting of Athena College for Roth's examination of political correctness in *The Human Stain* is highly significant. The heightened attention given to the plights of marginal subjects in American cultural life since the sixties – described varyingly under the rubrics of "political correctness" and "identity politics" – has found leading proponents within academic circles, most notably among humanities departments. Some commentators have noted how the radical sensibility that took root among the New Left during the late sixties has since migrated into academia, where former activists (now turned academics) have attempted to use the university and its curricula as sites for effecting both institutional and wider cultural change.[30] For example, universities like Berkeley have developed an affirmative action approach to their admissions policies in order to ensure a wider proportion of attendance from marginalised groups at their institutions.[31] Academics have also been influential in shaping and implementing the use of a politically correct lexicon that seeks to defend the dignity of various vulnerable sections of society from the "socially accepted Sadism" (Rorty 1998, 83) of previous derogatory labels. Perhaps the most profound changes effected by these new attitudes toward empowering traditionally oppressed groups within America are the challenges that have been made within curricula to the construction and interpretation of notions of cultural tradition. This has involved a re-examination of canonical notions of cultural heritage, bringing about changes in the selection of what areas of the past – which texts and whose histories – are prioritised for

[30] For example, George Packer has noted that, since the sixties: "[t]he radical desire to change society has been satisfied by an alchemical process known as 'neo-Marxism,' which has turned politics into the struggle over the syllabus" (282).
[31] For a somewhat critical treatment of Berkeley's admissions' policy, see D'Souza p.24 – 58.

study. By attempting to include previously unattended experiences and voices from outside the established literary Canon, for example, a more fragmentary sense of the cultural past is developed that brings into question the legitimacy of any unified and stable idea of 'Culture' or 'Tradition.' In addition, certain scholars have undertaken a re-evaluation of already canonised texts, in an effort to discuss how such integral components of the dominant literary tradition have been informed by previously overlooked issues such as race, gender and sexual orientation.

In attempting to thus complicate certain cohesive and prevailing notions of culture tradition, the proponents of this form of scholarship assert that "[w]hat is supported by PC [political correctness] is a 'politics of difference'" (Min Choi and Murphy, 131). As the following number of pages will demonstrate, it has been widely noted that the various movements behind political correctness and identity politics have borrowed from post-sixties theories of difference and deconstruction in their efforts to challenge notions of established power and cultural dominance. However, detractors among both conservatives and traditional left-liberals have found objection with the fragmented vision of humanity and culture that shapes identity politics. Such critics argue that the concept of difference put forth by what has been called the "cultural Left" (Rorty 1998, 79) becomes, paradoxically, absolutist to the extent that a shared language of compromise (or even disputation) is rejected in favour of a discourse which is tailored solely to the sensitivities and ambitions of a particular viewpoint. What critics of identity politics on both the Left and Right share is an insistence upon the importance – somewhat different according to their separate political agendas – of a common cultural tradition in which a complete and universal vision of humanity can be gauged.

As I have mentioned in my previous chapter, the development of a New Right sensibility since the 1960s has grown in opposition to leftist movements from the same period that have sought to question fixed and neutral assumptions about cultural

orthodoxy and social authority.[32] For instance, Peter Collier and David Horowitz balk at what they see as the horrifying manner in which the sixties "made society into a collection of splinter groups, special interest organizations and newly minted 'minorities,' whose only common belief was that America was guilty and untrustworthy" (19). This ascription of a language of hostile separatism to post-sixties' identity politics is typical of conservative efforts to see it as aberrant to "some kind of eternal or universal principle" (Min Choi and Murphy, 22). Dinesh D' Souza stands at the forefront of this assessment of political correctness, seeing it as a militant attack upon any kind of objective truth value in the name of 'special interest' factions. He describes how academic proponents of identity politics, having been "weaned on the assorted ideologies of the late 1960s" (17), went on to lead a "victim's revolution [that] is transforming what is taught, both inside and outside the American university classroom" (14). As part of their effort to arrest a perceived slide into cultural chaos, conservative critics have come to defend canonical notions of higher culture against contemporary efforts at revision. Refusing to entertain the challenges to epistemological notions of unity and objectivity within post-structural theories of difference, conservatives criticise strategies of political correctness and identity politics as narrow and factional attempts to regulate cultural knowledge. By contrast, they claim to uphold a disinterested cultural viewpoint that preserves important values of aesthetic expression, independent thought and free speech against the ideological prescriptions of the cultural Left.[33]

In terms of literary criticism, conservatives have virulently opposed the manner in which gendered, race-centred or any other such contemporary political readings of

[32] Jung Min Choi and John Murphy stress that: "[t]he [conservative] foes of PC argue that it is pushing today's society to the brink of chaos. They contend that this is because credence is given to 'relativism,' as a result of a persistent attack on objectivity, positive science, and uniform cultural standards" (19).

[33] This more conservative defence of notions of intellectual autonomy and free speech against the advances of politically correct thought is best demonstrated by D'Souza's assessment of the introduction of speech codes – designed to protect vulnerable identities from prejudice – on many elite American campuses: "Censorship regulations at several colleges today are restrictive enough that a typical policy at the University of Connecticut interprets as 'harassment' all remarks that offend or stigmatize women or minorities" (9).

literature set out to defile the transcendent and timeless values of canonical texts for matters of biased sectional expediency. An early figurehead for this struggle to preserve cultural order and authority by defending the literary Canon, Allan Bloom warned against the burgeoning protest for change within curricula at universities during the late sixties: "in order to admit all these specialties into the curriculum and give them equal status as they demand, all sense of unity and hierarchy has to be abandoned" (352). For Bloom, "[t]he quest [of knowledge] can never be for diversity but must be for" something more universal and eternal: "the truth about the highest good and the end of life" (363). "What our students most want and need," he argued, "is training in a few books in the great tradition which gives them models for the serious, rather than the sham, universality, books which ... provide not only an intellectual education but also a moral education insofar as they involve the reader's concerns with living the good life" (360). Echoing Bloom's concerns, John Ellis bemoans how the conjunction of post-structural theory and identity politics within contemporary literary studies has developed a mixture of "tribal chauvinism and resentment" (23) that seek "to reject Western society" (26). He goes on to discuss what he labels the "monotony and irrelevance" (47) of a "one-note criticism" that has "a fixed agenda and predetermined set of [political] concerns" (46). According to Ellis, such forms of "totalitarian criticism" (57) seek to conflate the literary text with ideology, thus removing literature from its more elevated role as a marker of the universal "essence of human situations" (40). Conservative critics thus locate in the cultural Left's approach to canonical understandings of culture and tradition a peculiar mixture of fragmented differences and oppressive totalities; post-structural relativism and an austere "conformity to preferred ideological positions" (D'Souza, xiv).[34]

[34] Collier and Horowitz's unremitting chagrin toward the changes wrought in academic curricula since the sixties provides yet another example of this conservative position: "Leftists have brought a postmodern Dark Age to higher education – "deconstructing" objective truths to pave the way for chic academic nihilism; creating a curriculum of contempt for American history and culture; and transforming many classrooms into chambers of inquisition and indoctrination" (7).

My previous chapter already outlines, albeit briefly, how certain left-liberal thinkers have also criticised what they deem to be the urgent efforts of the politically correct to separate the local or marginal from mainstream American culture, without reconstructing any alternative vision for collective social or political action out of the fragmentary units of cultural identity that remain. Despite their similar point of attack, such leftists and liberals obviously do not share in the Right's idea of a relationship between timeless cultural values and a conservative form of social order. In contrast, these commentators criticise the post-structural emphasis upon "the infinite distance which separates us from the other" (Rorty 1998, 97) as a purblind rejection of what is best about the Western cultural tradition: namely the potential for left or liberal forms of historical progress that inhere in traditional Enlightenment values and concepts. The radical post-structural logic of identity politics is, therefore, deemed by some to have rendered mute the possibilities for collective political mobilisation by seeing all liberal and leftist discourses of praxis in terms of "a colonialist smothering – an ideology to rationalize white male domination" (Gitlin 1995, 100). Robert Hughes describes how the post-structuralist suspicion that all notions of centred and integrated knowledge are repressively logocentric has left little room for any new constructions of political ideas or agents: "all you had left was language … with pervasive systems of repressive undecidability written everywhere in the surrounding culture, but no means of overcoming it" (63). Elsewhere, Eric Foner mentions how "[t]he same telescoping of the personal and political that widened the experience of individual freedom for so many Americans [during the sixties] also contributed to a growing estrangement from formal politics, and, indeed, from any notion of a common civil life" (305) in the post-sixties period. In opposition to this post-structuralist end-game in which the "only common condition worth thinking about was the impossibility of commonality" (Gitlin 1995, 102), the more traditionalist voices among liberals and leftists argue that notions of the oppressed margin can find alleviation within the progressive discourses of liberalism and the Left in America. Preferring to see Western Enlightenment tradition as a "many-celled edifice" rather than some oppressive "monolith," Robert Hughes, for instance, has argued that: "[f]or the past two hundred years, the victims of oppression have always

been able to find a transforming and strengthening vision within the literature and thought of Europe" (128).[35]

In terms of the literary Canon, left-liberal critics have warned against any blind usurpation of tradition that replaces once favoured texts with a new set of books by authors who originate outside of what has been considered mainstream Western or American culture. According to this viewpoint, cultural leftist efforts to radically disfigure the literary Canon carry a potentially restrictive agenda that values works of literature according to the efficacy of their political, moral or "therapeutic" (Hughes, 90) merit.[36] Hughes, for example, argues that the Western Canon is not predicated upon – as the cultural Right might proudly claim and the politically correct Left defiantly scorn – any static or reified "hierarchy of Timeless Values … [that it maintains] against the vicissitudes of the present" (93). Instead, for Hughes, "the history of literature is one of continuous inclusion and subversion" (94) that suitably demonstrates the very pluralism – marked out by tensions between dominance and oppression – that has so fascinates the cultural Left. In this sense, already established canons of literary history can be re-appropriated from their conservative cultural usage by the Right as a means of understanding how various struggles between centre and margin, power and subjection have been ongoing in Western culture. Henry Louis Gates has shown a similar concern

[35] Of course, I am fully aware that progressive notions of left and liberal can vary greatly, and are indeed often at odds with each other. Hughes's claim that identity politics has "weakened and in some areas broken the traditional American genius for consensus, for getting along by making up practical compromises to meet real social needs" (16) represents a conventional liberal stance that is much different to, for instance, Fredric Jameson's Marxist opposition to post-structuralism. In *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson argues that postmodernism – what he calls "the substitute for the sixties and the compensation for their political failure" – has provided "a crucial test of what is left of our capacity to imagine change at all" (xvi). Unlike Hughes, Jameson does not hark backwards to "some older and more transparent national space" (Jamexon, 54) that exists beyond the inchoate debris of postmodern culture. Instead, he explores the possibility of achieving a more radical leftist "breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing [late capitalism] … in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion" (54).

[36] "The quarrel over the Canon reflects the sturdy assumption that works of art are or ought to be therapeutic … This happens, or is supposed to happen, because the writer, whether it's Plato or Alice Walker, becomes a "role-model" for the reader. If you read Evelyn Waugh before you read Franz Fanon you may become a racist (if white), or (if black) suffer an attack of the bends through sudden decompression of self-esteem" (Hughes, 90).

with some contemporary approaches to studying African-American literature and culture. In their rush "to critique the essentialism implicit in notions of a common or universal American heritage," he argues, certain scholars have indulged in their own separatist "mode of [racial] essentialism" (107). Declaring his partial "agree[ment] with those conservatives who have raised the alarm about our students' ignorance of history," Gates insists that the study of canon formations are important for understanding how such selective processes of constructing cultural tradition have helped, at varying stages of the past, to legitimise the marginalisation and outright exclusion of African-Americans from the dominant culture: "[o]nce we understand how they arose, we no longer see literary canons as *objets trouves* washed up on the beach ... we can begin to appreciate their ever-changing configuration in relation to a distinctive institutional history" (109-10). Elsewhere, Gerald Graff insists that canons are not unitary and hermetically self-enclosed, but are formed in "dialogic relation" (60) to a variety of contesting cultural voices and modes of expression. According to him, these many points of conflict help us to understand how dominant literary traditions are created in tension with, rather than in complete separation from, more liminal forms of cultural experience: "[t]he point would be neither to deify nor to debunk Western culture, but to put it into relation to the forces challenging it" (68).

As the above citation from Gates suggests, there is a certain overlap in left-liberal and conservative criticisms of the way in which identity politics has attempted to dismantle the idea of a literary Canon. Certain left-liberals also share with those on the Right a dismay with the manner in which the politically correct binary of oppressed margin and dominant centre creates a rigid (logo-centric) moral absolutism all of its own. Robert Hughes's argument that marginal or vulnerable cultural identities have become encased by the sensitivities of a "culture of complaint" in which historical "grievance [is] elevated into automatic sanctity" (16), for example, shares deep resonances with D'Souza's similar appraisal of how political correctness has produced a "victim culture." However, the more progressive notion of the dominant Western tradition as heterogeneous and open to internal (and external, as Graff suggests) re-

evaluation works in opposition to the Right's attempt to monopolise the canonical past – literary or otherwise – by claiming it as a bulwark of certain conservative notions of social order and cultural universality. As my last chapter pointed out, the growing to prominence of identity politics among the post-sixties' Left has given rise to a situation in which "conservatives were picking up and claiming for their side the very concepts, valuable ones, that their left-wing opponents were busy discarding – merit, objectivity, universalism" (Packer, 307). Unlike the overriding progressive belief in redressing issues of historical suffering and inequality, conservative ideas of commonality are based upon a radical economic and political concept of individual self-determination. The New Right's doctrine of economic libertarianism, as I have suggested previously, has opposed both older methods of Rooseveltian reform and the more recent claims of identity politics with a transcendent "notion of the individual as fundamentally asocial and ahistorical" (Thompson, 12). In my discussion of *The Human Stain* that follows this brief discussion on the debates surrounding identity politics, I will explore in greater detail the ways in which Coleman's claim to a universal humanist concept of the self "as real apart and beyond the social determinants defining him" might intersect with this conservative notion of unfettered individualism. By presenting the complex ways in which Coleman's decision to pass beyond the confines of his race is compromised and frustrated in the text, I will examine how Roth approaches both conservative notions of cultural order and politically correct concepts of difference. In turn, I will also look at what the novel has to say about left-liberal ideas of American cultural identity.

As the previous few pages suggest, identity politics has simultaneously engendered a radical critique of cultural totalities, while also being labelled as rigid and prescriptive by its detractors. For both right-wing conservatives and old-fashioned Rooseveltian liberals, the post-structuralist (lack of) foundation for the cultural politics of the post-sixties Left appears to offer an irreconcilable polarisation of tradition, objective knowledge and a restraining centre on the one hand, with a radically multiplying sense of difference and the endless subversion of a common culture on the other. Yet according to certain of its proponents, identity politics does not necessarily

involve an exhaustive logic of either accepting or rejecting the dominant culture, but has been merely construed in such absolutist terms by those eager to dismiss it. In an effort to bridge the gap between the anti-foundationalist philosophy of cultural leftists and those left-liberals who insist that concerted political action relies upon a sense of cultural commonality and objectively established values, Min Choi and Murphy assert that: "questioning the traditional a priori status of common knowledge is not the same as doubting the possibility of shared information" (150). A politics of difference, in this sense, does not have to degenerate into narrow marginal perspectives, but serves "PCers to understand common knowledge to emerge from direct encounters between persons, which are constantly shifting and developing" (Min Choi and Murphy, 150). By offering a sense of the "shifting and developing" conditions of interaction between different social groups, such an argument would appear to re-introduce the notion of a shared – albeit somewhat provisional and revisable – historical situation. This argument shares some degree of resonance with the way in which people like Hughes, Graff, Gates and Rorty all suggest that sharp cultural differences can, in fact, find suitable recognition and expression within a broader sense of shared humanity or culture. Such claims, as I have shown, suppose that subjects on the periphery can participate in and prosper from a more universalising vision of common political action.[37]

By contrast, Stanley Fish insists that no underlying foundation or notion of "the common" (244) can be located beneath the post-structural logic of identity politics: "it is *all* embattled ground and no less so when it is labeled as 'common' ground" (246). For Fish, all narratives and positions are "challengeable, partisan, conflictual, differential," meaning that notions of difference themselves "cannot be privileged … without turning them into the kind of normative and transcendental standards to which they are

[37] For example, Rorty discusses the partial achievements of the cultural Left in helping to eradicate the various forms of social "stigma" (1998, 91) associated with race and other equally marginal experiences. He goes on to argue that such limited successes can be augmented by a positive interaction between politically correct advocates and the traditional politics of "the old reformist Left" (91). In order to achieve this idea of a coalition between the old and new strands of leftist action and thought, Rorty claims that: "the present cultural Left would have to transform itself by opening relations with the residue of the old reformist Left, and in particular with the labor unions. It would have to talk much more about money, even at the cost of talking less about stigma" (91).

putatively opposed" (248). For instance, he criticises what he sees as Gerald Graff's reification of the conflicts within Western tradition. "By making difference into a new 'common' ground," he explains, "Graff succeed[s] only in evading the lesson of its irreducibility" (248). This radical sense of ever-fissuring difference – "*it is difference all the way down*" (247) – in his argument is somewhat tempered by Fish's claim that the "poststructuralist characterization of the normative as a local rather than a transcendental realm … is not an assault on ethics but an account of the conditions – textual and revisable, to be sure – within which moments of ethical choice are always and *genuinely* emerging" (251). At first glance, this concept of ethical judgement might appear to re-introduce a provisional notion of the "common" into Fish's argument. At the same time, he is keen to insist that any such ethical position is always based upon a highly transient and "revisable" notion of historical co-ordinates: "if values and standards are themselves historical products, fashioned and refashioned in the crucible of discussion and debate, there is no danger of their being subverted because they are always and already being transformed" (264). The ever rapid changes and shifting positions involved in this textual idea of history – a history formed by "the crucible of discussion and debate" rather than by inert material forces – are very much at odds with the more concrete sense of a common tradition cited by people like Rorty, Hughes and Gitlin. In this way, Fish's determination not to let difference hypostasise as "common" would appear to set him radically at odds with those left-liberals who appeal to a usable American tradition of collective political action.

The "persecuting spirit" of Identity Politics in *The Human Stain*

Zuckerman describes the heightened sensibility of political correctness at Athena College as a form of narrow doctrine, in which certain vindictive urges to demonise others as politically "incorrect" are sanctioned by a virulent sense of moral righteousness. He refers to the zeal among Coleman's academic colleagues to blame and punish him over the "spooks incident" as an example of "America's oldest communal passion, historically perhaps its most treacherous and subversive pleasure: the ecstasy of

sanctimony" (2). This sense of a "persecuting spirit" (2) pervading national life finds a far greater context for Zuckerman in President Clinton's impeachment trial and the moral outrage directed against him over his sexual affair with Monica Lewinsky. Seeing a lamentable correlation in how both Coleman and Clinton have become victims to an American cultural environment in which people are "eager to enact the astringent rituals of purification" (2), Zuckerman seems to share in Robert Hughes's assessment of the enforcement of politically correct codes as a "process [that] is akin to the old American religious one of shunning and shaming" (Hughes, 51). This prevailing sense in which "life, in all its shameful impurity, once again confounded America" (3) finds yet further evidence for Zuckerman in the atmosphere of gossip and prejudice that surrounds Coleman's sexual affair with Faunia Farley, a janitor at Athena College. In particular, Delphine Roux, a jealous and vindictive former colleague who led the charges of racism against him, accuses Coleman of manipulating "an abused, illiterate woman half your age" (38). The alacrity with which Delphine positions herself as the defender of vulnerable womanhood in this instance is linked to her role in the novel as a determined academic proponent of identity politics. Delphine's eagerness to label Coleman as both a racist and a chauvinist forms part of her wider efforts to locate him as an example of the Ur-oppressor: the historically dominant white male to which her morally charged sense of political radicalism finds its point of attack.

In fierce opposition to the cultural and moral prescripts by which Clinton and Coleman are judged, Zuckerman repeatedly expresses a radical scepticism toward our ability to know people in such absolute terms. By insisting that "our understanding of people must always be at best slightly wrong" (22), he admonishes those who have sought to vilify Coleman and Clinton for indulging in what he calls a "purity binge" (2). There is an obvious irony in how Zuckerman's assertion that "[t]he things you *know* you don't know" (209) is set in opposition to the rigid moral fervour of Athena's brand of identity politics. In many ways, his sense of epistemological indeterminacy is more typical of post-structural theories of difference that seek to liberate the marginal subject from oppressive notions of the centre, while the cultural leftist thought of academics

such as Delphine appears as ideologically intransigent and essentialist. Unlike the more determinist language of race and gender that Delphine wields, the anti-foundational claim that we "don't know" anything for certain serves to bolster a creative idea of the self as its own author in *The Human Stain*, unanswerable to external notions of authority or origin. Over the many stages of Roth's literary development and most particularly in the Zuckerman texts, this quest for self-authorship is relentlessly pitted against a restrictive sense of inherited Jewish identity. As my introduction suggests, Roth's Jewish protagonists often set out to disown their localised ethnic allegiances in favour of the more liberating notions of individual self-possession that they discover in broader values of American democratic culture and high-literary tradition. Interestingly, this struggle between inherited origins and the self-determining subject in Roth would appear to reverse the claims made by certain post-structural critics about how far-reaching and dominant notions of literary and national culture work to stifle and oppress cultural differences. Figures such as Portnoy and Zuckerman are inhibited and frustrated – not empowered – by their sense of marginal and parochial beginnings as American Jews. By contrast, the more universal sense of cultural belonging that they seek elsewhere proffers a greater amount of self-liberation for these characters. Coleman's act of passing in *The Human Stain* is carried out with a similar hope of exploring the more expansive and unexplored territory of the private self that lies beyond his pre-assigned social role as an African-American. In this way, the personal and aesthetic quest to escape his origins and recreate himself anew that Zuckerman undertook in novels such as *The Ghost Writer* and *The Counterlife* finds important parallels in the biography that he constructs for Coleman.

Yet as I will illustrate later in this chapter, Roth's novel carefully examines how notions of the self as blissfully free from any determining origin or politically correct categorisation are almost as equally "wrong" as Delphine's authoritative claims about gendered and racial identities. Coleman's effort to acquire a greater sense of the self as it exists beyond the pre-determined assignations of race involves its own myth of personal origins. Such a vaunted ambition for an absolute form of self-knowledge and self-

possession contradicts Zuckerman's assertion that we cannot know anything for certain about either ourselves or others. Through the story that he weaves in *The Human Stain*, Zuckerman explores how certain inerasable experiences of ethnicity, race and class have worked to frustrate both his own and his protagonist's efforts to perceive their adult lives as being completely separated from the social context of their upbringing. Such a complex examination of Coleman and Zuckerman's longings for complete ownership of the self is highly consistent with Roth's earlier explorations of Jewish social identity. As my introduction discusses, the various journeys of accession into the myth of deracinated and self-determining subjectivity that many of Roth's characters make are, ultimately, frustrated by a residual sense of a wounded or marginalised Jewish experience. It is in this particular manner that the idea of a common and universal cultural inheritance that transcends more parochial experiences of Jewish belonging is made highly problematic in Roth's fiction. Through the distinct parallels that enmesh the stories of both Zuckerman and Coleman Silk in *The Human Stain*, Roth explores the manner in which this highly complex and divided sense of Jewish-American identity impacts upon arguments about commonality and difference in recent cultural debates in America. Roth's notion of inescapable origins is not mechanically deterministic or essentialist, but functions as an inassimilable trauma of marginalised social identity that compromises – as well as motivates – the individual's desire for self-reinvention. This paradoxically self-divided idea of an ethnic or racial heritage that is outright rejected by the individual subject and yet holds a persistent and insurmountable influence over him is thus sharply contrasted with the authoritarian and prescriptive language of identity politics articulated by Delphine and her cohort at Athena.

Zuckerman's statements about the epistemological gap that exists within our sense of what is 'real' about both the self and others thus hold clear significance for the notion of self-authorship which unites him, symbolically, with Coleman. This radical doubt over his understanding of the "facts" also has serious implications for Zuckerman's narrative efforts to author a credible account of the unreliable details that make up his knowledge of Coleman's biography. Self-conscious of his role as a highly

partial witness to the events and circumstances that have shaped Coleman's life, Zuckerman reflects upon the role that his literary imagination has served in bringing his now deceased friend back into (narrative) life:

> For better or worse, I can only do what everyone does who thinks that they know. I imagine. I am forced to imagine (213)

This declaration of his narrative intention to "imagine" a biography for Coleman recalls similar statements made in *American Pastoral* about having "dreamed a realistic chronicle" of the Swede's life. Both examples encapsulate the much repeated argument in other Roth novels about the inaccessibility of the facts beyond their translation into imagined or fictionalised forms. Zuckerman's assessment that we suffer from a paucity of any 'real' knowledge of things lends credence to the notion that he refrains in earlier novels about how literature serves as a surrogate for the ultimately unknowable reaches of life.

For Zuckerman, literature affords a possibility for re-imagining reality and, thereby, liberating life from the deadening facts and moral certainties involved in Delphine's censorious language of political correctness. Having been shown the letter sent to Coleman in which Delphine accuses him of "sexually exploiting" (38) Faunia, Zuckerman examines how it uses the words "[e]veryone knows" (209) to transform its narrow agendas of gender politics and personal vendetta into a claim to universally accepted knowledge. In doing so, he reflects upon the wider idea of epistemological doubt that concerns him as a writer:

> "Everyone knows" is the invocation of the cliché and the beginning of the banalization of experience, and it's the solemnity and the sense of authority that people have in voicing the cliché that's so insufferable. What we know is that, in an unclichéd way, nobody knows anything … All that we don't know is astonishing. Even more astonishing is what passes for knowing (209)

According to Zuckerman, it is fiction that serves to combat the reductive and aggressive economy of the "cliché." The radical sense of doubt implied by the fact that "nobody knows anything" permits an imaginative openness to varying and countervailing

narrative speculations on people and events. Such a creative willingness to explore what is merely probable or possible is stifled by the "[e]veryone knows" language with which Delphine efforts to excise "the jumble, the mayhem, the mess" (3) from life. The unpolished and impure aspects of contingency and indeterminacy that she refuses to countenance, however, are central to Zuckerman's concept of how both the self and writing are somewhat unmoored from pre-fixed notions of the 'real' or origin.

Zuckerman's concept of how writing and self-authorship are correlated by the contradictory knowledge that "nobody knows anything" finds added relevance in the notion of secrecy which runs throughout *The Human Stain*. His fictional re-telling of Coleman's story is engendered by a fascination with the hidden elements of subjectivity that litter his friend's past – his suspicion that "somewhere there's a blank in him" (213). The challenge to knowledge that is posed by such secrecy has dual implications in terms of both Coleman's identity and Zuckerman's narrative. The "blank" in his efforts to locate Coleman as a narrative subject marks out the uncertain space between fact and fiction that, somewhat paradoxically, engenders Zuckerman's richly speculative account of Silk's life. For Coleman, meanwhile, it is by keeping secret his origins that he is able to explore the creative possibilities of selfhood that lie beyond his identity as an African-American subject. The "concept of life as something whose purpose is concealed" (333) that he reads into Coleman's passing, therefore, finds favour with Zuckerman's narrative insistence that all assumed forms of knowledge are fundamentally dissonant and incomplete; fictional variations on the 'real.' By making "his disguise my subject … [and] the proper presentation of his secret my problem to solve" (45), therefore, Zuckerman finds in Coleman's history a suitable location for exploring the aesthetic relationship between personal acts of self-transformation and the writer's mode of reinventing life. Yet as this chapter proceeds, it will explore certain complications involved in these concepts of disguise and secrecy. I wish to examine how Coleman's hidden or repressed origins are revealed and re-visited during certain moments of crisis that make uncertain his liberated sense of post-racial identity. Furthermore, I will also look at how Coleman's ordeal is paralleled by Zuckerman's failed attempts to disguise

or make secret his own narrative presence in the American trilogy. Despite his efforts to free his art from certain autobiographical conflicts in these texts, the mixture of longing and anguished frustration that has marked Zuckerman's life as a Jewish-American subject continues to be made palpably evident in *The Human Stain*. Just like Coleman, then, Zuckerman's efforts to 'pass' over the complications of his marginal origins for greater purposes of creative (self-) invention are subject to a clear degree of frustration.

Zuckerman's intimate awareness of the fact that our epistemological and narrative claims upon experience are highly provisional and ultimately eschewed carries a double bind which threatens to reverse the creative possibilities permitted by its exilic notion of the 'real.' In one sense, he lionises fiction as a necessary supplement for our inhibited knowledge of the facts. According to this viewpoint, literature redeems a rich and multivalent sense of the (aesthetic) potentialities from a reality that is otherwise denuded of any clear form of meaning. At the same time, Zuckerman can also be seen in the novel to experience the void in our understanding of 'real' life as a dangerous vanishing point for his creative endeavours. This precarious tension between rampant literary invention and nullifying silence finds expression through the dramatic interplay between Eros and Thanatos that propels Zuckerman's writing both in this novel and throughout the series of Roth texts in which he appears. Zuckerman's authorship of events in *The Human Stain* registers an erotic longing to creatively transform what is known about the self and others in a way that surpasses the deadening endgames of "everyone knows" and "nobody knows." Yet this creative urge is (de-)centred upon an epistemology – "nobody knows" – that continually suggests a sense of thanatological nullity. This idea of how the secret or unknowable details of Coleman's life both stimulate Zuckerman's literary ambition and yet constantly elude his grasp finds a useful insight in Frank Kermode's *The Genesis of Secrecy*. Exploring in detail the fraught relationship between secrets and narrative interpretation, he describes "secrecy [as] … the source of the interpreter's pleasures, but also of his necessary disappointment" (xi). Such a difficult sense of how 'real' facts are both revealed and yet remain somewhat hidden finds clear parallels, as I will go on to discuss, with the paradoxical structure of

trauma as an event that has occurred, but which is still not fully assimilated to consciousness. Furthermore, the sense of personal liberation that the novel locates in the notion of the self as unknown and without a fixed origin also involves an idea of subjectivity as always, in some way, incomplete and therefore lacking a fully individuated sense of autonomy. I will outline below how the aesthetic and erotic possibilities that Zuckerman locates in Coleman's idea of the self as a *tabula rasa*, unconditioned by social forces, conflict with a certain traumatic experience of death or non-being which haunts his efforts to embody a new post-racial identity of white masculinity. In as much as the profound gap in his knowledge of actual details and facts both fuels and threatens to silence Zuckerman's imaginative reconstruction of events, Coleman's hidden origins represent a lack or secret that – although allowing him to creatively explore a life that is markedly other to his originally assigned social identity – comes to stand for his very status as an incomplete or racially marked white man.

Writing as a Form of "competition with death"

Having departed from his post at Athena College amid a torrent of rage at the accusations of racism made against him, Coleman befriends Zuckerman in an effort to get the "professional writer" (11) to tell his story. By doing so, he hopes to achieve the sense of moral vindication that his own struggle to explain the incident leading to his resignation, in a memoir entitled *Spooks,* has failed to manage. Explaining how "it required something like a feat of magic for me to stay awake" (18) when listening to Coleman's monomaniacal sense of injustice, Zuckerman is initially unenthusiastic about his new acquaintance. However, his attention is eventually arrested by the unexpected revelation of the sexual affair that Coleman is carrying out with Faunia, a woman who is thirty five years his junior. By re-evoking a deeply buried past life – "the oldest adult Coleman there ever was" – in which "his considerable talent for conscientiousness was spent garnering pleasure alone" (20), Silk's renewed sexual voracity supplies evidence to Zuckerman's overreaching claim that our knowledge of others is fundamentally inhibited by a sense of something hidden or unknown. As in previous Roth novels, the

erotic in this instance tests and broadens our limited understanding of the "facts," undercutting all pretensions to any authentic or coherent notions of the self and others. According to Zuckerman, it is the "contaminant of sex" that inaugurates "the falseness, the dissembling, the dual being, the erotic *professionalism*" (37) by which any innocent and unitary forms of self-knowledge are made to appear inadequate. Through his fascination with the "transgressive audacity" (37) of Coleman's unlikely erotic adventure, Zuckerman explores how desire is something that both registers and attempts to overcome a particular experience of lack (Thanatos/"nobody knows"). As I will discuss at greater length below, Coleman's efforts to overcome the harsh limitations of being socially excluded or absented as a member of a marginalised race are motivated by an erotic urge to explore the libidinal possibilities of "the raw I with all its agility" (108). In this sense, desire is not linked to static and completed notions of identity for Zuckerman, but maps out a complex relationship between a thanatological notion of lack (emasculation) and an erotic longing for presence (virility).

Before discussing how issues of sexual desire and death are connected in Coleman's self-authoring act of passing, I will first of all focus upon the way in which Zuckerman's narrative account of events in the novel is engendered by similar tensions between Eros and Thanatos. Derek Parker Royal has already highlighted some of the "narrative implications surrounding death" (2006, 127) in *The Human Stain*. Through his reading of several key passages in the novel, Royal has made clear how Zuckerman ruminates upon mortality as marking the ultimate existential experience of futility or meaninglessness. According to him, Zuckerman's particular mode of fiction is a powerfully erotic force aimed against the thanatological fact that, in the end, "nobody knows" anything for certain. This idea of a stay against death within the narrative is described, correctly I would argue, by Royal as a "transitory moment" (2006, 131) that is unable to affect any transcendent or permanent means of redemption from the vertiginous knowledge of the void. Standing at Coleman's graveside, Zuckerman makes this relationship between writing (as erotic longing) and Thanatos clear by describing how the novel we are now reading was begun as an aesthetic process of "entering into

professional competition with death" (338). The connection between desire and fiction as counter-drives to death is made further evident by Zuckerman's vicarious sense of involvement in the sexual affair between Faunia and Coleman. I will explore in further detail below Zuckerman's various ruminations upon how sex acts as a means of gaining a temporary reprieve from the misunderstandings and sense of loss that attend both their lives. In many ways, Zuckerman's growing narrative obsession with Coleman and the latter's renewed form of erotic longing in old age has the effect of re-awakening his own dormant sense of sexual/aesthetic desire. What he calls his "deliberately altered … relationship to the sexual caterwaul" (36-37), undertaken by means of his "experiment in radical seclusion" (44), is unexpectedly disrupted by Zuckerman's friendship with and artistic interest in Coleman. Having been "danced … right back into life" (45) by Coleman, Zuckerman is once again stirred, albeit vicariously, by the world of desire/fiction and all the "misleading and contradictory meanings" (37) that are involved in its erotic confrontation with death.

In as much as I borrow somewhat from his angle of focus, my discussion aims to diverge in important ways from Royal's. He does allude to the "uneasy commingling of Eros and Thanatos" (2006, 130) in the novel's treatment of how literature and sex afford only a temporary suspension of our knowledge that "nothing lasts" (*The Human Stain*, 52). However, I would argue that Royal fails to fully explore the contradictory interdependence between death and desire that runs throughout Roth's body of work, and which finds particular dramatisation within numerous passages of the novel in question. An example of how this close proximity between death and desire is marked out in *The Human Stain* is evidenced by a scene in which Zuckerman – describing himself as "play[ing] the part of the walk-on, an extra" (51) – directs his narrative gaze as a larger frame for the spectacle of Coleman watching Faunia at work, milking cows on a dairy farm. In a scene that is distinguished by its visceral and sexual imagery, Zuckerman describes how the unvanquished libidinal yearning of the aged Coleman marks a suspension of limits – namely of aging and death – by recalling "the injunction upon us … not merely to endure but to *live*" within "the enigma" of "the pointless

meaningfulness of living" (52). Recalling this episode after its two protagonists have been killed, Zuckerman highlights its significance as a stay against the concrete limitations and ultimate futility of existence:

> all was recorded as real by tens of thousands of minute impressions. The sensory fullness, the copiousness, the abundant – superabundant – detail of life, which is the rhapsody. And Coleman and Faunia, who are now dead, deep in the flow of the unexpected, day by day, minute by minute, themselves details in that superabundance.
>
> Nothing lasts, and yet nothing passes, either. And nothing passes just because nothing lasts (52)

Zuckerman's vicarious form of narrative desire is displayed by the way in which the text seems to join with the enclosed and atemporal world of erotic enjoyment that Faunia and Coleman inhabit. To an extent, this passage affects a quasi-utopian atmosphere through which both Zuckerman's writing and his protagonists appear to find a means of transcendence from mutable existence. However, in mentioning the irredeemable fact that Coleman and Faunia "are now dead," Zuckerman reminds us of how the eternal present of the "superabundant" into which his narrative has placed the lovers is made perishable by their eventual demise. His summation that "nothing passes just because nothing lasts" provides an interesting way of understanding Zuckerman's aesthetic mode in *The Human Stain*. The paradox of the crystallised scene which never quite lasts, yet also does not pass away into oblivion characterises Zuckerman's creative effort to rescue his literary subjects (Coleman and Faunia) from death. While agreeing with Royal's idea of the "transitory moment" established by libidinal and aesthetic impulses in Roth's novel, I wish to add to it by making more clear how Zuckerman's erotic urge to imaginatively reconstruct the facts of Coleman's story is continually haunted by the indeterminate chaos of the thanatological void over which he writes.

What I have discussed elsewhere as Zuckerman's erotic mode of impersonation finds a particularly expansive reach in *The Human Stain*. This approach to writing works to breathe life into people and events which are otherwise made alien to him, either by the falsity of rumour ("everyone knows") or the incomprehension that attends the failure of our efforts to gain full knowledge of them ("nobody knows"). The novel is littered

with examples in which Zuckerman draws attention to the fluidity of his dialogic technique. For example, he refers to how his ventriloquism of the deceased Faunia developed by means of his having "picked up the sassy vibrations of that straight-out talk that was hers" (338). The many vocal disguises of his fiction allow Zuckerman to thus inhabit other lives and plumb their otherwise secretive depths. The confounding and potentially debilitating awareness that "there really is no bottom to what is not known" (315) has the paradoxical effect of nurturing in Zuckerman an almost illimitable desire for exploring the possibilities presented by fiction. However, this sense of the creative/erotic pleasures afforded by writing in opposition to notions of death and unknowing is set against his acute awareness of the thanatological limitations affixed to his narrative means of detailing 'real' lives and experiences.

Zuckerman's sense of ambivalence and uncertainty as author in the text is demonstrated by the manner in which he is drawn to Coleman and Faunia's sexual courtship. Zuckerman's fascination with the affair between them is underwritten by certain anxieties about his role as the parasitical writer who seeks to unearth some fictional possibilities from the private and secret lives of others. At times, Zuckerman can be seen to inhabit a dual role as both the artist who preserves in his fiction the transcendent moment of the lovers' erotic union, as well as serving as a kind of intrusive onlooker to their intimate privacy. It is important to note that all scenes of sexual intimacy between Coleman and Faunia are re-constructed in the novel by Zuckerman, who does not have direct access to events, but for whom such moments act as important examples of the metaphorical relationship between Eros and fiction as counter-drives to death. There is a preserving impulse at work in the way that his narrative seeks to capture and, in some way, make immutable the lovers' momentary rejection of time and loss. Yet as the literary voyeur, Zuckerman in a way makes mutable this erotic scene by re-introducing it to the narrative time and form of fiction, with all the sense of provisional meaning that it implies in *The Human Stain*.

This suggestion that Zuckerman's fiction has a certain destructive or corruptive effect – as well as a life-affirming and redemptive purpose – is underlined by comparisons that are made between him and the figure of Lester Farley as stalkers who prey upon and violate Coleman and Faunia's intimacy. Farley is a traumatised Viet Nam veteran and the separated husband of Faunia. His obsessive jealousy leads him to spy upon Faunia and Coleman in a manner that implies a constant threat of violence toward them both. While he attempts to identify his narrative role with the erotic sense of renewal that Coleman and Faunia's affair represents, Zuckerman also suggests a certain kinship between himself and Lester as destructive interlopers. In a passage that begins with the intention of presenting Coleman's "head-on confrontation with Farley" (63), Zuckerman indicates the ambiguous position that he, as narrator, inhabits in relation to the lovers: "[a]s I reconstruct it, Coleman, so as to be certain that no one was spying on the house, was himself in and out the front door and the back door and the kitchen door some six or seven times in the hours after Faunia's arrival" (63). Somewhat self-incriminatingly, Zuckerman alludes here to how his artistic viewpoint has been imposed upon a scene in which Coleman is described as seeking to keep the prying gaze of others, particularly Les, at bay. Instead of dealing with the incident between both men "head-on" in his narrative, Zuckerman employs a certain artistic license by deferring the action and devoting a lengthy passage to his own improvised and completely fictional ruminations upon Coleman's private thoughts:

> It was time to yield, to let this simple craving be *his* guide … Learn, he told himself, before you die, to live beyond the jurisdiction of their enraging, loathsome, stupid blame (64)

By impersonating Coleman and imaginatively inhabiting his inner reflections, Zuckerman brings his deceased friend temporarily into existence in a way that places him at an elusive distance from "all this ridiculous antipathy he and Faunia had aroused" (64). However, by exteriorising within the narrative what he sees as Coleman's internalised desire to escape the judgment of others, Zuckerman has in many ways violated that protective space of secrecy and sexual "craving" in which Silk and Faunia have sought refuge.

As an agent of destruction and violence in the novel, Les Farley not only torments Coleman and Faunia's erotic union, but he also comes to represent a thanatological counterforce within Zuckerman's narrative account. Following Coleman and Faunia's deaths, Zuckerman's thoughts become dominated by his suspicion that it was Les who murdered the two lovers. However, his attempts to incorporate Les and his suspected actions within the narrative lead to a certain faltering of the fictional prowess that Zuckerman has demonstrated in his treatment of other, equally unknown lives in the novel. While standing at Coleman's graveside and contemplating the horror of his friend's death, Zuckerman speaks of Farley in terms of his being both a literal and narratological misfit: "I couldn't go myself because of Les Farley … he muscled on undisturbed, uncharged with any crime, manufacturing that crude reality all his own, a brute being colliding with whomever he liked however he liked for all the inner reasons that justified anything he wanted to do" (315). Les is presented here as a type of competing author, whose "crude reality" proves recalcitrant to Zuckerman's more speculative attempts at re-fashioning experience within writing. Zuckerman longs to redress what he sees as the gross injustice of Coleman's sudden and suspicious death by seeking to "put Les Farley away for the rest of his life" (308). His ensuing efforts to uncover the circumstances of what actually happened to Coleman and Faunia signal a sort of impotent frustration in his desire to transform and re-locate ("put away") Les within the still evolving narrative. Unable to deal with the unsatisfactory lack of information available, Zuckerman begins, uncharacteristically, to look for closure and certainty with regards to the events surrounding Coleman's demise. He describes at one stage how he became subject to the "foolish illusion" held by "the expectation of completion" (315) in his efforts to place "Farley as primary *cause*" (294) of Coleman's death. Numerous references are made in the narrative to Zuckerman's sleuth-like fascination with the fact that "[t]oo much truth was still concealed" (315) about the events leading to Coleman and Faunia's fatal car crash. He goes on to describe himself as behaving like "an amateur detective" (295) in search of possible "evidence" (302) that might make Les "legally accountable" (301) for his actions. Earlier associations between

Zuckerman's role as writer and that of a spy or stalker are recalled by this image of him as a kind of popular fiction detective. As with the previous comparisons made between him and Les as intruders upon Coleman and Faunia's intimacy, Zuckerman makes us further aware in this instance of how the redemptive function of fiction as a quest for meaning in opposition to death is also underwritten by a destructive instinct to purge life of its hidden depths and secrets. As an embodiment of the thanatological drive toward death and destruction, Les thus represents a particularly troubling source of epistemological uncertainty in the novel, against which Zuckerman's imaginative efforts to reconstruct 'real' events as fiction are faced by a harrowing sense of futility.

The confrontation between Zuckerman as creative author and Les as murderer – one in which I have attempted to show how the writer's role becomes inflected by the death and violence that Farley represents – is best demonstrated in the novel's final scene, where both men meet face to face. Having taking an inadvertent detour on his way to visit Silk's sister, Ernestine, Zuckerman's narrative attention becomes re-directed by his having stumbled upon the sight of Les ice-fishing on a frozen lake. Although filled with apprehension about his own safety, Zuckerman explains how he became drawn on by an obsession to travel "all the way across the ice to get my look at Coleman's killer" (346). The literal dangers involved in confronting Les are doubled by the manner in which he acts as hostile to Zuckerman's efforts to explore him as a potential subject for his fiction. Described as "ninety percent opaque and unreadable and ten percent alarmingly transparent" (347), Les is reticent in response to the numerous questions that Zuckerman directs at him. Refusing to reveal any details of his well-guarded personal life, Les rebuffs the writer's prying effort to transform 'real' lives and events into fiction. However, the aura of secrecy in which Les has shrouded himself also serves to intensify Zuckerman's aesthetic desire to probe into his hidden depths:

> The *fact* of him drew me on … This was not that way of thinking that is fiction writing. This was the thing itself … Here he is. That's all it had to do with it. That and my fear (349-50)

As a lifeless "fact," Les is much like the 'real' that Zuckerman's fiction contends with. He represents the coming into proximity of literary opportunity and nihilistic despair – life-affirming desire and death – as a result of writing's displacement from "the thing itself." Suspecting that he is being played with by someone fully aware of his role as "the author" (349) who cannibalises the secrets and private experiences of others, Zuckerman suggests that Les is merely "[n]eedling me" (356) with his terse and cutting remarks. In this sense, Les's refusal to reveal much about himself or to impart with any incriminating secret works as a thanatological counter-manipulation to Zuckerman's desire for some kind of authorial dominance over the facts surrounding Coleman's life and death. The encounter between the two men ends when Zuckerman's frustrated efforts to explore what lies beneath Les's many layers of secrecy are finally balked by a sense of horror at the personal and professional dangers involved: "[c]ompletely bested, I'd begun backing away" (259).

However, Les does in fact furnish Zuckerman with "a secret of his that is even bigger than the secret of this pond" (352). This comes in the form of a disclosure about his post-traumatic stress as a Viet Nam War veteran. Zuckerman explains how, in confessing his trauma, Les is consciously "telling me a war story … [t]o carry away as 'the author'" (352). Reading back through the novel retrospectively, it can be seen how Zuckerman does actually employ this information in the passages that deal with Les. Even more significant in terms of the overall structure of the novel, the contradictory knowledge that "nothing passes just because nothing lasts" defining Zuckerman's narrative can be understood in terms of the psychological experience of trauma as an event which has already occurred and been completed, but has yet to fully 'pass' into conscious existence for its survivor. Zuckerman's idea of an epistemological gap in our experience of the 'real' can be said to work as a paradoxical trauma at the heart of his writing, in so much as it designates a form of missing knowledge or unknown event that becomes repeatedly re-visited and re-interpreted through the imaginative ruminations of fiction. Les's function as a representative of the death-drive, working in opposition to Zuckerman's role as author, can be better understood in light of his traumatic war

experiences. Haunted by having "no way to prevent the past from building back up," Les is helpless against the sense of temporal dislocation by which the traumatic events that he has endured are repeated and relived by him: "instead of it all being behind him, it was in front of him" (74). Unlike Zuckerman, therefore, Les does not gain any sense of stimulation from this traumatically split manner in which people and events are both unknowable and yet almost endlessly reproducible as distorted narrative variations of what is 'real.' Instead, he seeks to put an end to the horror with which his traumatic (non-) experiences are numerously re-enacted.

Parallel Modes of Authorship: Passing and Writing

It is important to think critically about how the claim that "nothing *passes* just because nothing lasts" (italics added) functions not just in terms of Zuckerman's literary style, but also in relation to questions of social identity and passing that *The Human Stain* addresses. The relationship between Eros and writing that I have outlined above finds added significance through the way in which Zuckerman explores Coleman's passing as a libidinal act of self-authorship. Reflecting upon how Coleman's "art was being a white man" (345), Zuckerman expresses at numerous points in the narrative his view of Silk's passing as a brave act of creative ingenuity. He is particularly fascinated by the "the elixir of the secret" (135) that drives Coleman's attempt at self-authoring. Zuckerman explains how the "*gift* to be secretive" (135) ushers Coleman into a liberating sphere in which his life is no longer governed by the determinants of race, but where instead the possibilities for creative self-transformation appear almost endless: "it's like being fluent in another language – it's being somewhere that is constantly fresh to you" (136). There are obvious parallels being made here between the euphoric levels of self-liberation involved in Coleman's passing and Zuckerman's own sense of authorial prowess. "The sliding relationship with everything" (108) involved in Coleman's self-propelled passage from the African-American "we" (108) into "the boundless, self-defining drama of the pronouns we, they, and I" (109), for example, mirrors the fluid dialogic movement between voices and positions upon which

Zuckerman's fictional account of events is structured in the novel. The "beautiful calibration of his deceit" (334-5) by which Coleman's "heroic conception of his life" (335) came to be realised thus holds clear comparisons for Zuckerman with his own narrative technique of impersonation and self-disguise. As my argument develops, I will look closer at the ways in which Coleman's defiant act of imposture is linked to Zuckerman's efforts as a writer to imaginatively insert himself into the lives of other people and, thereby, conceal his own presence as a subject within the text. In particular, I will examine how Coleman's passing is inextricably bound in *The Human Stain* with Zuckerman's longing to liberate his fiction from the autobiographical conflicts surrounding his Jewish-American origins.

Zuckerman metaphorically relates passing to writing as an erotic urge for potency and self-control, working in opposition to the death-like hypostases of "everyone knows" and "nobody knows." He explains how Coleman's burning ambition for self-determination is comparable to the yearning for the "delights of sexual rapacity" that inaugurated Achilles' "brutal quarrel" (5) in Greek epic literature:

> It has to do with more than just being blissfully free. It's like the savagery in *The Illiad*, Coleman's favourite book about the ravening spirit of man (335)

The liberating sense of disguise that Coleman finds in "the power and pleasure ... [of] being counterconfessional" (100) finds resonance in Zuckerman's comments about the self-transforming effects of sexual desire. Zuckerman explains how the life of solitude and ascetic discipline which he has embraced in later life marks his attempt to overcome the hectic levels of self-reinvention and creative disguise that accompanied his experiences of erotic longing in the past: "I couldn't meet the cost of its clamouring anymore, could no longer marshal the wit, the strength, the patience, the illusion, the irony, the ardour, the egoism, the resilience … the falseness, the dissembling, the dual being" (37). In a later passage, he uses remarkably similar language to describe the imperative to impersonate and reinvent the self that was necessitated by Coleman's secret act of passing. Having at one stage considered confessing the secret of his origins

to his wife, Iris, Coleman relents by recalling the sense of heroic "battle" (179) that his life's great pretence involves. Coleman's momentary wish to reveal his true racial identity is described as an example of a "childishly sentimental" urge "to shed entirely one's mistrust, one's caution, one's *self*-mistrust, to think that one's difficulties have come to an end, that all complications have ceased to be ... to surrender the diligence, the discipline, the taking the measure of every last situation" (179).

The analogues between sexual desire and creative modes of impersonation that are made in *The Human Stain* recall the relationship between the erotic and the aesthetic in earlier Zuckerman novels, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Throughout the American trilogy, however, Zuckerman has sought to escape the complications and vulnerable sense of mutability that desire has previously brought to his life and writing. Yet although he claims to have totally renounced personal forms of longing, Coleman's story provides Zuckerman with an appealing display of the yearning to impersonate and re-create the self that was so evidently central to both his art and his personal existence in novels such as *The Anatomy Lesson* and *The Counterlife*. Similar to his near obsessive narrative interest in the sexual affair between Coleman and Faunia, Zuckerman enjoys a sense of vicarious pleasure by paying witness to the erotic and aesthetic urges that are involved in Silk's act of secrecy and disguise. In this sense, it is possible to trace how aspects of Zuckerman's erotic longing have not quite fully abated in the novel, despite his stout claims to have abandoned all involvement in the "sexual caterwaul." I will return to the broader implications of this observation later, in an effort to understand how and for what reasons Zuckerman has attempted to keep his personal desires hidden or *secret* through the act of writing about others in *The Human Stain*. By exploring the manner in which his dormant erotic impulses are re-ignited by Coleman's story, I will look at the wider literary significance of how Zuckerman's libidinal presence re-emerges within the text.

In ways that are similar to my own argument, Derek Parker Royal also points out some of the correlations made by Zuckerman between his own concept of literary

authorship and Coleman's bold commitment to autogenesis. Royal locates a certain shared sense of creative freedom in both men's symbolic experiences of death. Just as Zuckerman's fictional imagination works within the empty space left by the realisation that "nobody knows anything," Royal points out how Coleman re-creates his identity *ex nihilo*, following the passing into death of his African-American self: "with the negation of identity comes the possibility of subject re-creation" (2006, 138). My own examination of the text highlights some of the partial merits of this argument. However, I would contend that Royal falls short by failing to deal with the ambivalence that Thanatos brings to the shared sense of libidinal yearning which motivates both Coleman and Zuckerman's creative acts of (self-) authorship. In what follows, I will explore how Coleman's erotic urge to transcend the obstacles of his race finds a thanatological barrier in certain aspects of his abandoned origins that refuse to fully pass away, thereby exerting pressure on his "masterly performance" (335) as a self-authored subject. By arguing thus, I wish to counter Royal's observation that *The Human Stain* "gets to the heart of Philip Roth's (post-modern) project of signifying American identity, ethnic or otherwise" (2006, 138).

Of course, Royal is not the only scholar to have read *The Human Stain* as an example of Roth's **"**post-modern" interest in the ability of the contemporary American subject to escape his or her social origins and re-define the self in new and more expansive terms. Francoise Kral, for instance, suggests that in Roth's novel "identity is interstitial; it is found at the point of juncture for different categories of gender, class, and culture" (48) For Kral, this obscuring of the borders that traditionally exist between separate social "categories" allows for a sort of postmodern exploration of new and highly mutational identity formations: "a negotiation between different existing definitions, which, in turn, forms a new one and contributes to an infinite spectrum of identities, thus calling for new interpretative patterns that should prove able to take account of the fluidity, the complexity, and the provisionality of identity" (54). Mark Maslan has also indicated the ways in which Coleman's "passing reveals the performative nature of supposedly natural categories of identity" (381). He goes on to

suggest that the act of "escaping the confines of purportedly natural identities" is achieved in Roth's novel by simply "performing them differently" (381). Maslan reserves criticism, however, for what he sees as Roth's decision to locate Coleman's "performative" act of passing within a wider notion of "historical commonality" (381) by linking it to a distinctly American tradition of individualism and self-fashioning. By making Coleman's rejection of an assigned racial identity as "merely the precondition for embodying a national one" (381), according to Maslan, Roth goes some way to re-inscribing yet another, even more encompassing notion of "natural" or historically inherited identity.

As my previous chapters have already suggested, Roth does not endorse any outright postmodern rejection of the past and its stifling traditions in favour of some notion of the self as an endlessly revisable narrative or performative text. Instead, I would contend that ideas of cultural origins or social categorisation (Jewish or otherwise) in Roth's fiction are treated with far more ambivalence than the arguments of Royal, Kral and Maslan might suggest. I have already mentioned above how Zuckerman locates liberating notions of impersonation or performativity in Coleman's passing. This attitude is fully consonant with Zuckerman's overall rejection, throughout different novels, of the concept of "natural being" (*The Counterlife*, 320) or fixed origins in favour of creative acts of disguise and self-reinvention. However, as I have been suggesting throughout this thesis, the overriding will to create the self anew in Roth's fiction is not exercised in any complete separation from more stifling notions of the 'real' or origin. Instead, the desire for self-mastery is engendered by a necessary tension with those external pressures that set out to repress such longings in the first place. In other words, efforts to re-define the self and escape the weight of the familial and ethnic past in Roth's work are, in a highly contradictory sense, both restrained and given impetus by certain experiences of assigned social identity. For example, at the end of *The Counterlife*, Zuckerman suggests that it is the ancient Jewish ritual of male circumcision which, paradoxically, acts as a sort of defining 'origin' for the will to

impersonate and reinvent oneself beyond a given sense of historical beginnings or identity:

> circumcision gives the lie to the womb-dream of life in the beautiful state of innocent prehistory, the appealing idyll of living "naturally," unencumbered by man-made ritual. To be born is to lose all that. The heavy hand of human values falls upon you right at the start, marking your genitals as its own. Inasmuch as one invents one's meanings, along with impersonating one's selves, this is the meaning I propose for that ritual (323)

One does not live "naturally" precisely as a result of the "man-made ritual[s]" of history. To seek self-liberation by inventing "one's meanings" and "one's selves," therefore, is a direct response to being ensnared by the pre-defined rituals and markings of history. While Kral suggests that Coleman's passing involves just such a "negotiation" of "existing definitions," I would argue that Roth lays greater stress on the deep historical limits of self-reinvention than she does. Through a further exploration of the limits of Coleman's passing, I will illuminate upon the extent to which very much 'real' social forces have clashed with his efforts to re-conceive the "facts" of his existence. As I have briefly mentioned when discussing Royal's argument, this sense of an obstacle frustrating Coleman's erotic desire for self-possession is represented symbolically as a thanatological experience of death or non-being.

Before discussing the ways in which Coleman's orgasmic "trajectory outward" (135) in search of an unfettered notion of the self is curbed by certain symbolic moments of death, I wish to briefly return to the idea of trauma as an experience which renders the subject incomplete and dissolute. Coleman's African-American origins serve as a form of trauma that is inassimilable to his concept of himself as a self-defining individual. Determined "not [to] allow his prospects to be unjustly limited by so arbitrary a designation as race" (120), Coleman goes in search of an asocial idea of the self that will help to repress all knowledge of his traumatic origins: "[a]ll he'd ever wanted, from earliest childhood on, was to be free: not black, not even white – just on his own and free" (120). However, I wish to show how Coleman's racial past is not completely departed from by his act of passing, but works like a trauma in the way that it recurs as

something that demands his reluctant attention. There is an obvious example of this experience of unconscious return in the incident that precipitates Coleman's departure from Athena College. His unwitting use of a racially loaded term, "spooks," works as an example of what Freud called the uncanny: "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" ("The Uncanny," 930). Elsewhere, Coleman's submerged past comes back to haunt him when he berates his lawyer, Nelson Primus, by referring to his "smug fucking lily-white face" (81). In this particular instance, Coleman repeats a pejorative statement used against him by his brother Walter, following his decision to pass as white some fifty years earlier. As in the case of Zuckerman, Coleman demonstrates here the extent to which he has internalised the harsh rebuke against his perceived betrayal of family and racial loyalties. It is after this incident with Primus that Coleman begins to contemplate "[h]ow one is revealed or undone by the perfect word … the right word uttered spontaneously, without one's ever having to think" (84). From this reflective position, he undergoes a lengthy reverie upon his African-American origins, which forms the basis of the "Slipping the Punch" chapter.

This notion of Coleman's racial heritage as a trauma that cannot be easily overcome or *passed* over places a damaging curb on notions, entertained within the novel, of subjectivity as a mode of ultimate self-possession. Most tellingly, Coleman's abandoned origins find a delayed expression in the form of an irrepressible and discomforting surplus that lurks within his post-racial identity as a white man. By drawing upon contemporary debates on the formation of "whiteness" in American culture and history, I hope to show in the remarks that follow how Coleman's self-created identity in *The Human Stain* fits a model of white subjectivity that predicates itself upon a rejection of race as a perturbing marker of what is "non-white." By following this line of argument, I aim to highlight the manner in which Coleman is made to experience a sense of racial anxiety by means of his relationship with Faunia, whose alien and non-white social existence forces him to re-visit the trauma of his own racial past. It is in this way, I would contend, that Roth's novel explores how Coleman's

daring attempt to "spring the historical lock" (335) of his assigned racial identity is ensnared by the "stranglehold of history" (336).

Theories on the Construction of Whiteness

In his study *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past*, David Roediger suggests that certain post-racial theories in contemporary America are based upon deeply encrypted cultural notions about the racial neutrality of white identity. Roediger opposes the claims of the "colorblind right" (2002, 13) which suggest that the benefits of middle-class prosperity in America are non-specific to race and, therefore, accessible to everyone. He argues that this conservative "'race is over' stance ignores existing inequalities … [by] declaring race to be utterly malleable" (2002, 14). Rather than permitting a radical sense of upward social mobility, according to Roediger, such an idea of post-racial equality actually reinforces racial hierarchies by making a long-held ideal of the racially uninflected white subject into the aspiring model for American citizenship and belonging. He traces the historical lineage of racially blanched concepts of whiteness in America to nineteenth century ideologies of slavery, in which the independent and self-determining white subject was contrasted with its servile and dependent racial other. Roediger emphasises how this ideal of the free white individual was underwritten by distinctly masculine notions of economic independence and democratic enfranchisement. By contrast, race was linked to enslaved and emasculated conditions of economic dependency and social immiseration. However, as Roediger makes clear, the link between race and servility was not always made exclusive to issues of "colour" and African-American slavery. He goes on to highlight how certain immigrant and industrial working class communities in the 19th century, who were as yet to achieve a level of economic self-sufficiency or socio-political status worthy of the free white American male, became labelled as wage dependent and impoverished "non-white" people: "ideas of freedom for the mass of white males developed in tandem with notions and practices that ensured that those who were not white could not pursue happiness effectively in political, social, and economic realms" (2002, 123). Roediger

suggests that it is this markedly racial (and gendered) configuration of whiteness that continues to find currency in the conservative ideal of post-racial citizenship. While claiming to envision an end to racial hierarchy by marking the privileges of whiteness as open to all, it works to consign those who are still outside the sphere of middle-class success as socially degraded and unworthy non-white subjects. Karen Brodkin has referred to this as a "core constitutive myth," in which the attainment of whiteness as an economically and culturally privileged position stands as a pre-requisite for American social inclusion: "[i]n this myth, the alternatives available to nonwhite and variously alien 'others' has been either to whiten themselves or to be consigned to an animal-like, ungendered underclass unfit to exercise the prerogatives of citizenship" (24). Like Roediger, Brodkin discusses how this prevailing notion of citizenship has developed out of an historical "construction of the American working class as 'of color' and outside the circle of national belonging" (23).

According to both Brodkin and Roediger, the contrast between whiteness as ideal and non-whiteness as abject has been sharpened by prominent stereotypes that link race and class to certain forms of moral and cultural aberration. Remarking upon the way in which a degraded notion of "preindustrial permissiveness [was] imputed to African-Americans" (2007, 106) during slavery, Roediger has discussed how bourgeois virtues of industrious individualism and moral self-control became attributed to ideas of whiteness in the same period: "the white working class, disciplined and made anxious by fear of dependency, began during its formation to construct an image of the Black population as 'other' – as embodying the preindustrial, erotic, careless style of life the white worker hated and longed for" (2007, 14). Equally for Brodkin, the historical construction of "socially sanctioned whiteness" (41) was predicated upon a rejection of certain perceived notions of moral laxity and licentiousness that were ascribed to the non-white subject: "[w]hen immigrants were seen as a necessary part of that working class which did the degraded and driven labor, they were constructed with stereotypes of blackness – stupid, shiftless, sexual, unable to defer gratification" (71).

In these studies, what is made evident is how a particular ideal of "American citizens [as] white and middle-class" (Brodkin, 23) – with its emphasis on the virtues of a strong, disciplined and independent form of masculine individualism – is based upon a racially sensitive notion of whiteness that consigns those who lie outside its borders as undeserving non-whites. Roediger and Brodkin explain that while these ideas about whiteness originate in earlier constructions of race and slavery, they have helped to form an American middle-class ideal of independence and freedom that is still very much prevalent. Those non-whites who fall short of this ideal have not always necessarily been defined by the physical denotations of race or "colour," but may in fact be poor or working class "whites" whose socially marginal position leaves them lying anxiously outside of the benefits of whiteness. In this way, race and class become intertwined and blurred, where the racial subject is marked by economic disadvantage and the experience of poverty is posited as an inherent characteristic of the de-natured non-white. In what follows, I hope to show how Coleman Silk in *The Human Stain* finds that in order to pass as a non-racial subject he must reconstruct his identity along the lines of this prevailing concept of whiteness. I will pay particular focus upon how Coleman's acquired sense of white subjectivity is later made uncertain by his affair with Faunia. I will suggest that, as a member of a marginalised underclass, Faunia reacquaints Coleman with the trauma of non-white social exclusion which he had earlier abandoned along with his African-American origins.

Being "co-opted": Coleman's Passing and the Limits of Self-authorship

The very much real dangers involved in his act of passing require that Coleman conceals his origins within an exterior of whiteness. The phallic energy associated with the unrestrained potential of "the raw I" thus becomes quickly dampened by another version of the stifling "we" or "they" from which he had originally sought escape. Despite early pretensions to being an artist and living a Bohemian lifestyle in Greenwich Village, Coleman's new life as a white man following the war soon loses its aesthetic reach. Instead, he is "co-opted" (110) by a model of white identity that demands

obedience to certain forms of middle-class respectability: “the pleasure of being conventional unconventionally, but that wasn’t really the idea” (110). The de-eroticising effect of living within “the protection of the walled city that is convention” (335) is evidenced by the dangers that sex poses for Coleman’s act of self-concealment. It is in his sexually vibrant relationship with Steena Palson that the young and resolutely free-spirited Coleman first encounters the possibility of his African-American origins being exposed. Having misread one of the poems that she writes about him as making use of the word “negro” (112), he frets over the dangers of being “found out” as a result of the intimacy that sex involves: “[i]n that anarchic crazy place, how much of me is being seen, how much of me is being discovered?” (113). It is while visiting a white prostitute that Coleman’s racial identity is actually uncovered, as a result of which he is violently removed from a brothel. Although he manages to escape any further consequences that might have arisen from this particular incident, such a worrying moment of exposure underlines his need to vigilantly conceal his true origins. In contrast to his initial sense of erotic adventure and ambition, therefore, a deeply calculated sense of social conformity and sexual propriety begins to shape Coleman’s efforts to hide his racial lineage and pass as white: “a life of little, if anything excessive on the surface because all the excess goes into the secret” (335).

As I have been suggesting, Eros is tied to an aesthetic notion of the self as lacking any fixed social origin in *The Human Stain*. However, this idea of desire is always underpinned by a notion of death and impermanence that makes transient its potential moments of libidinal fulfilment. In one sense, Eros represents a liberating and creative notion of self-mastery (potency) in Roth’s novel. At the same time, this concept of the individual as unconditioned by broader historical forces is based upon an idea of the self as somewhat amorphous and lacking any clearly formed sense of social identity (impotence). As the previous paragraph suggests, Coleman’s erotic longing to author and control his own personal destiny is inscribed by a thanatological sense of lack or incoherence that is potentially detrimental to his highly individuated identity as a white man. Having concealed himself within the sober and de-eroticised conventions of

middle class conventions for most of his adult life, Coleman is re-introduced to "the perpetual state of emergency that is sexual longing" (32) in his affair with Faunia. As a result, he is returned to the life of libidinal excess that he had earlier led "before the serious things took over completely" (25). In this way, Coleman's late sexual adventure has a double and contradictory effect: while it provides him with a liberating and life-sustaining sense of erotic pleasure, it also marks a chaotic and indeterminate space of desire in which his rigorous disguise of whiteness is threatened by a sense of lack or incompletion.

As he suggests at certain stages of the narrative, Coleman is somewhat aware of how the restorative power of his sexual affair with Faunia risks bringing chaos and death to the more permanent social benefits that are guaranteed by his sense of white middle-class identity: "I know that there's no insurance that you can buy on this … the thing that's restoring you can wind up killing you" (35). Faunia brings Coleman into close proximity with a world that is marked as socially abject in contrast to his life of middle-class respectability. Identified at one stage as being part of a degraded "subspecies" (164), Faunia is presented as lacking the sense of coherent identity and individual autonomy that might mark her as white. Her turbulent existence on the social margins is described by Coleman's lawyer, Nelson Primus, as "everything that is the antithesis of your own way of life" (157). In trying to make Coleman realise the dangers involved in "Lester Farley's wild grievance" (78), Primus insists upon making clear the threat that Faunia's underclass status poses to his client:

> Faunia Farley is not from your world. You got a good look last night at the world that's shaped her … a world where nobody's ruthlessness bothers to cloak itself in humanitarian rhetoric (80)

Described as being devoid of "rash compulsions" (78) or any "incriminating impurity" (79), Primus represents the rational and de-eroticised world of whiteness in which all forms of abjection and disorder are excised. By angrily referring to him as "lily-white" Coleman unconsciously highlights the sense of race – in terms of a racially neutralised idea of whiteness – involved in the ideal of "professional reward and bourgeois success"

(79) that Primus is trying to uphold by advising him. Despite this tone of defiance, however, the affair with Faunia causes Coleman much anxiety by re-acquainting him with his own hidden origins as a racially marked subject. In this way, while providing a momentary form of transcendent ecstasy that places the lovers outside "[a]ll the social ways of thinking" (229), Coleman's affair with Faunia also threatens to re-introduce him to the trauma of his prior exclusion from the social register of whiteness.

Read in the context of Brodkin and Roediger's arguments, the relationship between ideas of white and non-white in *The Human Stain* is quite often situated by perceptions of class. For example, Nelson Primus attributes Les's dangerous violence to the fact that he "works on the road crew" (76). Elsewhere, Faunia's coarse and unsentimental manner is described in ways that relate her violent and sexually brutalised history to her economic status. For example, Coleman explains to Zuckerman how she has "the laugh of a barmaid who keeps a baseball bat at her feet in case of trouble … the coarse, easy laugh of a woman with a past" (35). Faunia's degraded social position as a member of an American underclass works in thanatological tension with the erotic function that she performs for Coleman. The sense of pleasure and stimulation that he and Zuckerman both share in watching Faunia working at the dairy farm is contrasted by the manner in which she later speaks about the same scene. While Zuckerman expounds upon the "stupefying power" of "an enamored old man watching at work the cleaning woman-farmhand who is secretly his paramour" (51), Faunia later de-eroticises this image by asserting the sense of economic struggle and social displacement that it involves: "the dairy farm is a lot of fucking work, to you it sounds great and to you it looks great, Faunia and the cows, but coming on top of everything else it breaks my fucking hump" (227). Faunia repeatedly makes clear to Coleman why the restorative effect of sex cannot completely suspend "the matter-of-factness of [their] being separated by unsurpassable social obstacles" (47). Her determination to dispel any delusions about their erotic courtship is re-stated during another scene, where she dances at the request of the watching Coleman. Undergoing what is described as a "formal transfer of power" (227), the dance moves from being an act controlled and authored by

Coleman's male gaze into an erotic ritual in which Faunia makes clear to him the paradoxical interplay between desire and loss. She attempts to show him how sex affords only a temporary respite – "[t]hat slice out of time" (229) – from their social differences and problems, cancelling out briefly what she derisively calls "[e]verything the wonderful society is asking" (229). While desirous of its sense of euphoric release, she holds no illusions about the possibility of eternalising the erotic moment – "the indulgence of the fantasy of forever" (236) – which she shares with Coleman. In this manner, Faunia is keen to remind him of how the painful experiences of her economic struggle and class status persist outside of the exhilarating moment of their erotic union:

> Last night? It happened. It was nice. It was wonderful. I needed it too. But I still have three jobs. It didn't change anything. That's why you take it when it's happening, because it doesn't change a thing (235)

While Coleman's "greedy fascination appropriates" (51) the image of Faunia milking the cows, a later scene of him secretly watching her during a break from her second job as an Athena College janitor has a much different effect. In this particular instance, "his vantage point" (157) affords no sense of an erotic spectacle. Instead, his idealisation of Faunia as a "Voluptas [who] makes virtually anything you want to think come true" (157) is corrupted by a jarring realisation of her social (and racial) otherness. While watching Faunia sitting on the grass and joking with one of the male janitors, Coleman ponders how: "without him to take her cues from, she took cues instead from the gruffest example around, the coarsest, the one whose human expectations were the lowest and whose self-conception the shallowest" (157). This unexpected moment in which he is forced to clearly witness the extent of Faunia's debased social status brings into considerable doubt Coleman's erotically charged sense of being in authorial control of both himself and his surroundings. Outside of her role as his "Voluptas," Faunia no longer "takes her cues" from Coleman's instruction, but instead appears to be shaped by a particular social environment in which his "white" notion of self-authorship is glaringly absent. Coleman's class (and racial) anxieties over Faunia's social background are made clearly evident by "this scene of no great moment on the lawn back of North Hall [which had] exposed him at last to the underside of his own disgrace" (157).

Immediately following this moment of horrid realisation, he calls his estranged son, Jeff, to tell him that "my affair with this woman is over" (171). Contrary to the actual explanation which he gives for this decision, Coleman contemplates privately that it might be solely "[b]ecause she works as a janitor" (171). This "scene of no great moment" is in fact an important one of delayed traumatic awareness for Coleman. By being suddenly made aware of the full extent of Faunia's lowly social position, Coleman is once again faced by the harrowing spectre of non-white marginality that he had previously left behind in his determination to pass as a white man.

As I have been suggesting, Faunia represents the abject elements of excess or incalculable remainder to the supposed racially neutral idea of whiteness with which Coleman has identified. In contrast to Coleman's intermittent bouts of apprehension and revulsion over her non-white status, Faunia appears to willingly embrace her marginal social position. On discovering after her death that Faunia was originally born into wealth and also that she left behind a written diary, Zuckerman describes how she disguised herself as lower class and feigned illiteracy in order to pass in the opposite direction to Coleman: from a privileged social background to a degraded condition of non-whiteness. Her willingness to become declassed and 'un-whitened' marks a performance in social disguise that was designed "to spotlight the barbaric self befitting the world" (297). In language that echoes Zuckerman's claims about the "shameless impurity" of life, Faunia articulates the idea of an inherent "human stain" (242) from which Roth's novel takes its title. Her description of a 'fallen' or 'stained' humanity involves abject images (often bodily) of surplus and imperfection that cannot cohere with the pristine and de-eroticised notion of the self contained within Coleman's concept of whiteness:

> we leave a stain, we leave a trail, we leave our imprint. Impurity, cruelty, abuse, error, excrement, semen – there's no other way to be here … The stain that *precedes* disobedience, that *encompasses* disobedience and perplexes all explanation and understanding. It's why all the cleansing is a joke (242)

In contrast to Coleman and Faunia, Les is unable to pass in either direction as white or non-white. The experience of war has not had the desired effect of confirming his heroic participation in American society. Instead of gaining esteemed recognition for his military service, Les finds that he is made into an alien and undesirable figure by his involvement in the Viet Nam War: "[w]hen he comes home the first time everybody says that he isn't the same person and that they don't recognise him … they're all afraid of him" (64). Despite going "back [to Viet Nam] a second time to finish the goddamn job" (64), Les is unable to breach the traumatic rupture between his war experiences and domestic life back home. In contrast with the wilful sense of being doubled or under disguise that Coleman and Faunia demonstrate, Les is rooted to the injurious past and unable to find a means by which to pass back into society. He embodies an irreversible and insurmountable experience of trauma that makes impossible his longing to regain the coherence and balance enjoyed by the younger, "easygoing Les, who didn't know what it meant to feel hopeless" (64-5). Les, therefore, represents most harshly the horror and confusion of the traumatic condition of American non-white exclusion in Roth's novel.

The different ways in which Coleman's "passionate struggle for singularity" (108) in the novel is compromised by the imperative to become whitened suggests the stark social limitations involved in his historically transcendent concept of the self as existing outside of the "color line." The complex exploration of issues of racial origins and passing in Roth's novel, therefore, clearly challenges what Roediger calls the "colorblind right" and its universalising assumptions about the asocial context of the individual. The stentorian concept of Coleman as "the greatest of the great *pioneers* of the I" (108) would indeed appear to share clear resonances with contemporary conservative ideas about the individual's relative freedom from concepts of socio-historical determination. However, I would like to suggest how his initial decision to pass is actually rooted in the heightened levels of social mobility and cultural inclusion in America that found expression in the mid-century era of liberal consensus.

Although Coleman, we are told, "wanted to be a poet or a playwright far more than to study for a degree, the best way he could think to pursue his goals without having to get a job to support himself was by cashing in on the GI Bill" (110). Restricted by social and economic constraints in exploring further the sense of aesthetic ambition that at first motivates his great attempt at self-authorship, Coleman's meteoric rise within the whitened world of bourgeois success and respectability – first as a scholar and then as an academic – is largely facilitated by what Karen Brodkin has described as "one of the most revolutionary post war programs" (38) of liberal reform: the GI Bill. Brodkin highlights the important contribution of the GI Bill to the sense of middle class "upward mobility" (41) and national belonging that the post-war climate of liberal consensus extended to Jewish-Americans and other European ethnic sub-groups, who had up until this period been largely excluded from the economic and cultural benefits of whiteness in America. Placing particular emphasis on the way in which the GI Bill undertook to finance the education of de-mobilised servicemen, she remarks upon how such important legislative provisions "were decidedly not extended to African-Americans or women of any race" (42). Brodkin's analysis of how the GI Bill and other opportunities within the age of liberal consensus helped to fashion "a lowering of [the] racial barriers" (41) that had kept American Jews marginalised from mainstream national culture up to this point thus throws Coleman's passing into an important contextual light. As I have outlined in my last chapter, the markedly liberal democratisation of American life after World War Two provided a great sense of social and economic possibility in the personal lives of Jewish characters such as Zuckerman and, to a far greater extent, the Swede. Likewise, for Ira and Zuckerman in *I Married a Communist*, popular progressive ideas about American history and the plight of the "common man" allowed them to discover a more expansive and liberating notion of cultural origins beyond their more marginal beginnings as ethnic Jews. Coleman's decision to attenuate his act of passing by disguising himself as a secular Jew in *The Human Stain*, therefore, marks an effort to avail of the vastly increased sense of social opportunity that arose among this newly whitened ethnic group following the war. By hiding his racial origins within a social identity that is erstwhile shedding its historical association with a "deficient African

American culture" (Brodkin, 151), Coleman would appear to have fully taken note of his father's insight into the astute assimilative qualities of the Jewish community: "Jews … were like Indian scouts, shrewd people showing the outsider his way in, showing the social possibility, showing an intelligent colored family how it might be done" (*The Human Stain*, 97).

I will discuss a little later on, in relation to issues of literary tradition, how Coleman's passing as Jewish/white provides a focus through which Zuckerman ponders to what extent he and his generation of American Jews have been defined by their whitening: the suppression of an historical experience of racial otherness.[38] As in the case of the Swede, who is reluctantly made to realise a sense of Jewish historical exclusion in *American Pastoral*, the trauma of Coleman and, by extension, Zuckerman's non-white origins in *The Human Stain* calls into question notions of deracinated subjectivity or American cultural commonality that underwrote the democratic ideal of widespread middle class prosperity after World War Two. Michael Thompson has interestingly traced a certain continuity of thought between the starkly contrasting politics of the progressive liberal tradition and the new American Right by showing how both share a lineage with the nineteenth century liberal values of individual liberty and democratic capitalism. He points out how the universalising ideal of social mobility and self-advancement that was fostered by the heightened moment of progressive liberal belief at mid-century "has given rise to and maintains certain aspects of the new conservative impulse in American politics" (11). According to this analysis, broader values of middle class whiteness would appear to find common instances of hegemonic appeal in the separate epochs of what Brodkin highlights as the post-war era of liberal consensus and Roediger suggests is the contemporary moment of right-wing conservative monopoly. In this sense, what I have been suggesting is the particular form of inspiration and opportunity that post-war liberal values give to Coleman's ambition to

[38] Brodkin explains how Jews became white by means of "showing how similar Jewish culture was to bourgeois cultural ideals and upon differentiating Jewish culture from a depraved and unworthy African American culture" (150).

abandon his racial origins could be deemed to take on aspects of a more right-wing attitude toward individual freedom and post-racial citizenship, once placed in a later end-of-century context.

As I have been arguing, *The Human Stain* disentangles the racial and class prejudices that lie beneath whitened concepts of cultural universality and individual autonomy, whether they be of the spirit of post-war liberalism or part of a more contemporary conservative ideology. However, despite the manner in which Roth's text exhumes the class and racial divisions buried within such notions of a common American identity, it does not look favourably upon what it presents as the rigid ideological prescripts of Delphine and her politically correct allies. I would suggest that, as in *American Pastoral* where certain repressed experiences of race and gender were related to a particular trauma of labour, Roth's exploration of the relationship between class and non-white experience in *The Human Stain* goes beyond the purely cultural pre-occupations of identity politics. In many ways, by showing how Coleman's concealed experience of racial origins are re-invoked by Faunia's lowly socio-economic status, Roth's novel would appear to share with Rorty and other more traditionalist liberals a sense in which material issues of class and social power cut across exclusively cultural and gendered understandings of suffering and marginality.

In this regard, I would strongly resist Walter Benn Michaels' assessment of how Roth's fiction treats issues of Jewish marginality. In his reading of *The Plot against America*, Michaels criticises Roth for "activating a certain nostalgia for anti-Semitism" (296) that fails to register sympathy with the inequalities of race and class in contemporary America. He sees Roth's novel as sharing in a discourse of identity politics that, in failing to tackle the "money line" as part of the "color line" (293), only succeeds in obscuring the problems of poverty and social discrimination which underlie American historical experiences of ethnicity and race. For Michaels, Roth's novel is preoccupied by "issues that render economic inequality either irrelevant or invisible or both" (298). However, as I have argued by recourse to contemporary debates on

whiteness, Roth's interest in Jewish identity is inextricably tied to contemporary issues of both race and class in *The Human Stain*. As my reading of *American Pastoral* has already suggested and my discussion on *The Plot against America* will further highlight, Roth's later fiction has shown an avid interest in the ways in which experiences of ethnicity and race have been aligned with or sidelined from the progressive liberal narrative that dominated mid-century America. What Roth outlines in these three texts as the particular limitations of ethnic and racial assimilation into mainstream American culture that this spirit of liberal nationalism involved are inextricable with persisting economic questions of labour and class.

Passing and the Literary Canon

Coleman's idea of himself as an individual who is not formed by the social conditions of his race is directly connected to his education in the great works of Western literature. Canonical texts – particularly the Greek classics that he has spent his life studying and teaching – serve as the main source of inspiration from which he comes to align himself with certain universal humanist values over any separate sense of identity and tradition peculiar to his African-American origins. Coleman's decision to escape his racial heritage is described in the text as the result of a desire "to be no longer circumscribed and defined by his father" (107). However, the inalienable sense of freedom from his distinct racial background that Coleman discovers in the wider cultural world of high-literature stems largely from his father's strong pedagogical influence. As one who inculcates among his children a firm sense of the "tremendous advantages of intellect" (102), Clarence Silk disapproves of the young Coleman's boxing club as a place that "was for slum kids, for illiterates and hoodlums bound for the gutter or jail" (97). By contrast, Clarence stresses the merits of education as the means by which Coleman can establish himself among "the topmost ranks of Negro society … someone people would forever look up to" (102). Education is thus linked to a vaunted idea of self-advancement and respectability – what the Silk's evince by their role as a "model Negro family" (86) – which Coleman's father sees as the pinnacle of achievement within

a racially divided society. Refusing to allow the disadvantages of race to exclude him and his family from attaining a high standard of cultural knowledge, Silk senior's steadfast attitude to self-improvement through education is designed to challenge what he describes as the historical "presumption of intellectual inferiority" (103) underlying racism in America.

His father thus imparts to Coleman an appreciation for a canonical notion of Western literary heritage – "[i]n the Silk family they had read all the old classics" (93) – that can be shared equally among all mankind and which surpasses socio-historically imposed ideas of segregation or racial "inferiority." Ross Posnock, for instance, suggests that "Mr. Silk is a Duboisian figure who dwells in the deracialized 'kingdom of culture'" (2006, 205). However, the values of racial pride and self-respect that Clarence invokes in the novel mark an acutely practical awareness of the actual social divisions and restrictions caused by race in America. By contrast, Coleman discovers in the supra-racial idea of high-cultural tradition that he inherits through his father a significant motivating factor in his decision to pass as white and, thereby, escape his paternal origins as an African-American. As Zuckerman explains, it was his father's "powers of speech [that] had inadvertently taught Coleman to want to be stupendous" (107). The actual moment of epiphany in which Coleman decides to reinvent himself is traced back to the inspiration that he receives when reading from his father's favourite Shakespearean play:

> "What can be avoided / Whose end is purposed by the mighty gods?" Lines also from *Julius Caesar*, quoted to him by his father, and yet only with his father in the grave did Coleman at last bother to hear them – and when he did, instantaneously to aggrandize them. *This* had been purposed by the mighty gods! Silky's freedom. (107-8)

This passage encompasses a contradictory mixture of both defiance and obeisance toward paternal authority that is typical of Roth's interest in the fraught relationship between fathers and sons. In a manner that reflects Zuckerman's youthful desire in *The Ghost Writer* to abandon his "unliterary origins" for the broader sense of cultural inheritance that he finds in great works of literature, Coleman's decision to author his

own future involves a rejection – made more possible by his father's death – of his familial origins as an African-American. Yet despite the sense of filial rejection involved in Coleman's passing, his decision to re-fashion the self along lines that are not restricted by the social barriers of race marks an effort to "aggrandize" the particular lessons in humanist thought by which his father has instructed him to become an intellectual equal to white people.

Described as an ambitious and ardent academic disciple of French post-structuralist theory, Delphine Roux takes a scythe to the "engendered language" (191) of what she labels Coleman's "so-called humanist approach to Greek tragedy" (193). In keeping with her overall language of political correctness, Delphine's de-centred feminist approach to literary criticism is presented in the novel as somewhat militant and didactic. Firmly opposed to the "parochial ideological concerns" (191) of this "prescribed method" (184) of criticism, Coleman is interested in what he sees as the more fundamental and universal lessons to be garnered from Greek literature. For him, the politico-cultural agenda of Delphine and others marks an insular means of closing off the possibilities for disinterested thought and, thereby, de-intellectualising criticism and debate. At one stage in the text, Delphine tries to defend a female student who tells Coleman that she found certain Greek tragedies on his course "degrading to women" (184). For Coleman, Delphine's eagerness to encourage narrow gendered readings among students represents "one of the best ways to close down their thinking before it's even had a chance to begin to demolish a single one of their brainless likes" (192). Throughout *The Human Stain*, various other voices express similar concerns over the broader sense of cultural decline that is taking place as a result of this recent onslaught against humanist scholarship and its intellectual principles. For example, Coleman's sister Ernestine links what she sees as a wide scale collapse in standards of cultural knowledge to a declining appreciation for the pedagogical values that were instilled among the Silk children by their father. Talking with Zuckerman at Coleman's funeral, she explains that: "[t]oday the student asserts his incapacity as a privilege … [t]here are no more criteria Mr. Zuckerman, only opinions" (330-31). It is to this same sense of an

immutable standard of learning that Coleman appeals in opposition to Delphine's more relativist view of education and literary criticism. Defending the pressing need for canonical erudition among a generation of students who "are intellectually barren" (191), he argues that: "[t]o read two plays like *Hippolytus* and *Alcestis*, then to listen to a week of classroom discussion on each, then to have nothing to say about either of them other than that they are 'degrading to women,' isn't a 'perspective,' for Christ's sake … [i]t's just the latest mouthwash" (192). Yet despite the apparent lack of sympathy in text for Delphine and her localised approach to questions of literature and subjectivity, Roth's novel also subjects Coleman's brand of scholarship – what Delphine sees as Coleman's pretension to having "no perspective other than the purely disinterested literary perspective" (191) – to various troubling moments of fissure. As I have been suggesting, the transcendent humanist values that Coleman discovers through his reading of canonical literary texts are central to the deracinated concept of "white" subjectivity which comes to define his act of passing. However, in so much as Faunia's non-white status brings Coleman's whitened sense of himself as a post-racial subject into a certain level of disarray in the novel, his affair with her also casts doubt over the profound and immutable concept of life that he finds in works of classical Greek literature.

As one whose accession into white America has been achieved by means of his success as a student and educator, Coleman finds further evidence of Faunia's social marginality in her inability to read and write. Illiteracy leaves Faunia devoid of the sense of intellectual agency with which Coleman has authored his own (white) identity. At one stage in the text, Coleman is asked by his daughter Lisa, who is exasperated by her struggle to teach dyslexic children, "[w]hat do you do with the kid who can't read?" (161). When he hears this question, Coleman's thought are re-directed immediately toward Faunia:

> Well, what *he* did with the kid who couldn't read was to make her his mistress. What Farley did was to make her his punching bag. What the Cuban did was to make her his whore, or one among them – so Coleman believed more often than not (161)

Faunia's intellectual disability helps to illustrate for Coleman why she has remained passive to exploitation and brutality: "[b]een waiting for the next thing to happen all her life" (162). Her lack of any decisive sense of individual self-mastery (whiteness) is placed in sharp contrast with the way in which Coleman's concept of himself as an autonomous and self-integrated subject is directly linked to his literary education. However, Faunia's intimate sense of the thanatological incompletion and uncertainty in life – described by Zuckerman as her means of "trumping learning by a knowledge that is stronger and prior" (297) – threatens to dissolve the intellectual and cultural means by which Coleman comes to define his sense of whiteness. By re-awakening him to the erotic potential "of all he has *missed* by going in the opposite direction" (164), the affair with Faunia exposes Coleman to a more anarchic form of experience that cannot be framed by the neatly ordered concept of life which he had previously gleamed from his reading of Greek literature:

> To live in a way that does not bring Philoctetes to mind. He does not have to live like a tragic character in his course … As is. Sans language, shape, structure, meaning – sans the unities, the catharsis, sans everything. More of the untransformed unforeseen. And why would anyone want more? (170)

Declaring "convention unendurable," Coleman embraces the radical estrangement from his white middle class world that he discovers in "the obligation to subject my life to hers and its vagaries" (171). The "truancy" and "strangeness" (171) that he finds in Faunia's life, therefore, thwart Coleman's desire for complete authorial control over his own existence. The sense of "structure" and "unities" that Greek literature has furnished to his understanding of life has been blown apart by the "vagrancy" (171) implicit to Faunia's heightened (erotic) awareness that death and impermanence undercut all pretensions to absolute knowledge and self-possession.

Throughout *The Human Stain*, Zuckerman locates various examples of this disordering gap between the lessons of Coleman's humanist understanding of literature and his actual lived experiences. Like Peter Tarnopol, Murray Ringold and Zuckerman

himself, Coleman is made to realise that the contingent and unknowable aspects of 'real' life refuse to conform to his literary "model of reality" (*My Life as a Man*, 194). Instead, he is forced to understand that "outside the classical tragedy of the fifth century B.C., the expectation of completion, let alone of a just and perfect consummation, is a foolish illusion for an adult to hold" (*The Human Stain*, 315). These conflicts within Coleman's exalted idea of literary tradition are mirrored by certain divisions in Zuckerman's role as author-narrator in *The Human Stain*. As I have already illustrated, Zuckerman's narrative interrogates how Coleman, Faunia and Les are all secretly or openly inflected by a traumatic experience of non-white social abjection. Yet despite his fascination with such marginal experiences, Zuckerman reveals nothing of the particular sense of lack or conflict at the heart of his own hyphenated divisions as a Jewish-American subject in this novel. Instead, he assumes a position of the detached and self-abnegating literary author, personally removed from the lives and events that populate *The Human Stain*. As the narrative interpreter of events, Zuckerman is identifiable in the novel through the far-reaching statements that he makes about the gaps in our knowledge of the "facts"; what he outlines as the thanatological frustrations that subtend all desire for meaning and self-presence. Yet by finding particular evidence for such broad-sweeping proclamations through the conflicting sense of personal possibility and limitation (Eros and Thanatos) that defines Coleman's passing, Zuckerman attempts to deflect attention from the similar levels of yearning and frustration which marked his own biographical experiences in novels such as *The Anatomy Lesson* and *The Counterlife*. Having been made painfully aware of the brutal self-divisions that have attended his involvement in the "sexual caterwaul," Zuckerman attempts to withdraw from the confusion involved in the relationship between erotic longing and thanatological loss. By estranging himself from "the rush of the world," he has sought "a rich, full solitary existence" (44) in which personal forms of desire/narrative are renounced in service of an erotically neutral and disinterested engagement with the formal and abstract problems of his craft.

Through exile and solitude, therefore, Zuckerman seeks "to organize the silence" by exchanging the preoccupations of the self and stimulations of social life for an

impersonal commitment to the traditions of literary work: "to find sustenance in *people* like Hawthorne, in the wisdom of the brilliant deceased" (44). Just as Coleman sought within the humanist idea of tradition a version of the self that is not marked by his racial origins, Zuckerman finds within the literary past a form of cultural inheritance that appears to transcend the particularities of his biographical conflicts as a Jewish-American subject. By thus assuming the role of the depersonalised and objective writer in the style of Lonoff, Zuckerman commits his own secret act of passing. As one who conceals the conflicts and disunities of a personal history beneath his guise as a disembodied and asocial aesthete, the aesthetically mobile Zuckerman "passes" through the lives of others and adopts their speech as his own. Yet although his own story remains unspoken throughout the novel, the traumatic impact of his ethnic origins upon Zuckerman's life and literary career can be traced via his vicarious interest in Coleman's passing. In other words, it is possible to locate Zuckerman's repeatedly frustrated desire to overcome his Jewish-American past as something that is displaced within or *passed through* Coleman's story. Faunia's remarks about how "all the cleansing is a joke" because of the irredeemable fact that "we leave a stain" or "imprint" finds particular resonance here. Zuckerman has sought a form of "cleansing" in later life through his renunciation of "every last professional yearning and social delusion" (43). Yet despite his efforts to remove himself as a desiring subject from the scene of writing, the "stain" left by Zuckerman's highly erotic mode of authorship is evidenced by his obsessive desire to understand his own traumatic experiences through the comparable struggles that have beset Coleman. As I have suggested earlier, Zuckerman's description of Coleman's act of passing as a feat that was achieved by rejecting paternal guidance and discovering a separate sense of the self within a humanist concept of literary tradition marks a clear reprisal of his own youthful struggle to transcend the authority of his Jewish father. In this sense, it is possible to read in this novel the hidden story of how Zuckerman, like Coleman, is traumatically divided and doubled: he is both at one and the same time a literary aesthete who is impersonally committed to the high traditions of his art, and a Jewish-American writer who is fixated by the complexities involved in his ethnic experience. These close parallels between Coleman and Zuckerman can be

understood in relation to the idea of trauma witness that I have discussed in previous chapters. Just as Coleman is forced to confront the marginal social circumstances of his own secret past in Faunia's non-whiteness, Zuckerman re-acknowledges the hidden trauma of his Jewish-American origins in the story of Silk's passing.

Trajectories Outward and Inward: Zuckerman's Irreconcilable Self-divisions

What I have been outlining as the antagonism which lies at the heart of notions of canonical tradition and cultural identity in *The Human Stain* has sparked an equally conflicting level of debate among readers. Mark Shechner, for example, finds a "parallel to the Stalinism of *I Married a Communist*" in what he disparagingly calls Delphine's "French-fried Feminism" (2003, 196). Her "petulant and opaque interpretations of literature," Shechner explains, represent "the intransigent party line of the historically aggrieved and theoretically armored subaltern" who sets out to viciously defile the "broad and tolerant humanism" (196) of Coleman. In stark contrast to this assessment, Brett Ashley Kaplan critiques what she calls the "neoconservative" politics of characters in the novel who oppose political correctness and set out "to mock the opening up of the canon to 'others'" (2005, 173). In this rather pointed way of reading the various reactions to identity politics in Roth's text, she goes on to suggest that "in *The Human Stain*'s paradoxically liberally-inflected neoconservative view, political correctness prevents racial reconciliation by insisting on stifling categorization" (173). Shechner and Kaplan's polarised views tend to overlook what I have been suggesting are the ambiguities with which Roth's novel treats deracinated universal concepts of cultural identity and literary tradition. In their separate ways, they both read Roth's novel as an uncomplicated and outright defence of humanist tradition against its subversion by the cultural Left.

In ways that find some degree of resonance with my own argument, David Tenenbaum provides a greater awareness of the complex manner in which issues of race and whiteness inform Roth's text. He argues that "Coleman Silk hopes to find in

Faunia's own sense of [social] degradation a refuge from his drive to overcome the stigma of his race" (36). Yet despite suggesting that Coleman "takes a certain comfort in abandoning the white hegemony and the façade that merely epitomizes his shame" (46), Tenenbaum asserts that Silk's search for "acceptance of his [racial] identity" from Faunia is highly problematic: "to be forgiven by a woman who has resigned herself to the nether regions of social progress hardly seems a suitable consolation for all that he must sacrifice in the name of such a specious integrity" (49). Although Roth certainly does not advocate any facile notion of the positive or liberating aspects of non-white identity in *The Human Stain*, I would suggest that Tenenbaum's argument fails to fully explore the manner in which Coleman's affair with Faunia calls into question the very relationship between ideas of whiteness and "social progress." Furthermore, Tenenbaum claims that the manner in which Coleman seeks to relinquish the "pursuit of perfection" involved in his passing as white marks an abandonment of his once cherished humanist standards of excellence in culture and thought: "a capitulation to the emptiness of American values" (49). By arguing thus, he would appear to ignore the ways in which *The Human Stain*'s exploration of social experiences of non-whiteness and class interrogate the notion of disinterested and immutable standards involved in Coleman's humanist brand of scholarship.

Explaining that "passing is actually a salient instance of self-imposed purification, a subjection of the core self to a disciplinary project of control and subtlety" (2006, 203), Ross Posnock's assessment of "the limits and illusion of freedom" (193) involved in Coleman's efforts to become white would also appear to intersect with aspects of my own argument. However, Posnock refuses to see the shortcomings of Coleman's passing in any social context of race or class. Instead, he suggests that Roth finds "Coleman's individualism wanting" (214) because of how it demonstrates a rather strained and socially restricted example of "man's propensity for play, for mimicry and invention" (193). In contrast to these rigid aspects of "Coleman's project of self-making" (213), Posnock claims that the erotic affair with Faunia opens Silk to a more fluid space of creativity and self-reinvention in which "the reign of absolutes and the

routine of convention" (215) are constantly dissolved. He completely dismisses any notion that either the longing for a totalised form of self-mastery evidenced by Coleman's passing or Faunia's contrasting lack of a sense of "proprietary and protected individualism" (216) may be understood in the light of historical experiences of race and whiteness. His refusal to entertain such questions of social identity in *The Human Stain* is consistent with Posnock's assertion that in Roth's works of fiction: "the force of the unsocialized and the force of literature are symbiotic, and both release us from bondage to the correct and approved" (18). As my previous references to Posnock make clear, such a sentiment is indicative of his overall argument that Roth's modernist-formalist style of writing completely scorns politically correct approaches to literary criticism and cultural identity.

Jennifer Glaser examines certain tensions in the text between what she calls "multicultural" (1466) notions of identity politics and the "concept of passing as performative in a way that de-essentializes subjects and their relation to race" (1469). She refers to the non-white cultural history of American Jews and the ways in which "Roth taps into this liminal Jewish racial heritage" (1471) in *The Human Stain*. In doing so, Glaser explores the extent to which Roth (she does not really mention Zuckerman) finds in the limits of Coleman's passing a refracted means of looking at how his own cultural ascent to the status of the deracinated writer, freed from the specific cultural inflections of his ethnic heritage, "occasion[ed] a loss" (1471). She suggests that: "[a]lthough it would seem that Roth's use of passing is meant to challenge the prevalent discourse of multiculturalism, his exercise of the trope also emphasizes his own anxieties about his decision to pass as 'a writer' rather than 'a Jewish writer'" (1471). By arguing thus, Glaser claims that "Roth transforms his novel from a mere critique of the imperative to write as a black or a Jew into a more characteristically ambivalent document" (1475). She informs us that, although "Roth harshly critiques political correctness" (1474) in *The Human Stain*, he provides us with "a new kind of multicultural literature, a literature situated at the intersection of races rather than in a system of racial binaries" (1476). Glaser concludes her essay by explaining that "while

the novel is a critique of multicultural politics, it is also Roth's attempt to write himself into the multicultural canon" (1476).

Glaser's assessment of Roth's novel as an "ambivalent document" clearly reflects aspects of my own argument about the tensions between universal humanist values and de-centred notions of subjectivity in *The Human Stain*. I would suggest, however, that her idea about how Roth is writing a "new kind of multicultural literature" involves a certain elision of the searing conflicts which exist for Coleman and Zuckerman between their commitments to a historically transcendent notion of literary culture and the traumatic social experiences of race and ethnicity that still haunt them. By insisting that "*The Human Stain* is a prototypically American narrative" about "the limits of self-fashioning" (1476), Glaser would appear to neatly re-inscribe Roth's novel into an existing national tradition. For instance, in arguing that the problems of ethnic and racial heritages in the text may be understood as emblematic of the overriding conflicts "at the heart of the nation's symbolic imagery" (1476), she fails to examine the extent to which experiences of class and non-white social exclusion have rendered doubtful the notion of full American citizenship for certain characters in *The Human Stain*. According to Glaser, therefore, Roth's new brand of "multicultural" literature – "situated at the intersection of races" – would appear to prioritise what Stanley Fish calls the notion of a "common" American experience over the manner in which certain politically correct positions tend to fortify a rigid and exclusionary "system of racial binaries."

There are, of course, obvious merits to the suggestion that Roth is interested in the ways in which the experiences of marginal ethnic and racial subjectivities can be assimilated within the broader reaches of national life and established notions of literary tradition. As this thesis has repeatedly indicated, Roth's characters have always pursued a "trajectory outward" from their parochial Jewish beginnings and toward wider notions of deracinated cultural identity. In particular, Zuckerman has sought to reinvent himself by escaping from his "unliterary origins" and finding a new sense of belonging in the

greater cultural heights marked out by the literary past. I have already indicated how this desire to escape the peculiarities of his ethnic heritage continues to find expression in *The Human Stain* through the manner in which Zuckerman assumes a position as the detached and disinterested literary interpreter of events in the life of Coleman Silk. Yet despite this yearning to escape "the agitation of the autobiographical," the fraught conflicts and erotic strivings surrounding Zuckerman's life-long battle to unfetter himself and his art from the narrow restraints imposed by his Jewish origins are re-inserted into the text through his examination of the trauma of non-white subjectivity and class that interrupts Coleman's attempt to author his own destiny. Zuckerman's struggle in the later trilogy to write in a way that renders mute the traumatic conflicts at the heart of his personal biography as an American Jew thus continues to find a certain level of frustration in *The Human Stain*. As I have discussed at considerable length throughout this thesis, it is this inability to wield complete authorial mastery over the "facts" surrounding his social and familial origins that lies at the heart of Zuckerman's aesthetic. Despite his many efforts to emulate the "paleface" standards of Lonoff's impersonal mode of writing, Zuckerman's conflicts with aspects of 'real' life produce a "redface" literature in which his self-divided sense of ethnic affiliation continues to be of utmost relevance.

This sense of a relentlessly raging conflict in Roth's writing between disinterested notions of aesthetic autonomy and extra-literary aspects of Jewish cultural identity completely undermines conservative notions about literature as something that transcends the prosaic particularities of its historical context. I have already suggested the ways in which contemporary rightist concepts of cultural universality are called into considerable question in *The Human Stain* by Roth's exploration of the forms of limitation and social exclusion involved in post-racial ideas of whiteness and citizenship. Yet despite this resistance to historically transcendent notions of cultural identity and literary tradition, Roth's fiction is equally antagonistic toward suggestions that it might be defined by the narrow limits of his Jewish origins. As I have suggested earlier, the politically correct ideas about social identity and literary criticism voiced by Delphine in

The Human Stain are dismissed as an authoritarian reduction of the erotic and creative sense of autonomy that Coleman and Zuckerman seek to discover in more expansive, humanist notions of cultural heritage. The irreconcilable divisions over issues of Jewish origins and authorial freedom in Roth's "redface" fiction, therefore, resist the contrasting forms of essentialist thinking about identity and literature that have been put forth by both the cultural Left and the New Right in America since the late sixties.

However, it remains to be discussed whether the unremitting experience of traumatic self-division in Roth's treatment of Zuckerman as the hyphenated, Jewish-American author can find greater consonance with the more democratically assimilative and fluidly re-negotiable notions of a common cultural heritage put forth by progressive liberal thinkers like Rorty and Hughes. Unlike the somewhat uncompromising notions of historically transcendent individualism bred by conservative ideologues in recent times, American liberalism since Roosevelt has shown a pragmatic approach to understanding and dealing with certain forms of historical exclusion and inequality existing within democratic capitalism. In true progressive fashion, this brand of liberalism aims to ultimately achieve a somewhat egalitarian ideal of national community that will be inclusive of all American citizens. Yet in contrast to what they see as the impatient and utopian demands of revolutionaries on the Left, American liberals have adopted a more practical and gradualist approach to levelling out the gaping inconsistencies between their projected vision for the future and currently existing social divisions. This contradictory blend of progressive idealism and acute pragmatism shaping the Rooseveltian trend of liberalism has thus held forth an exalted concept of universal cultural belonging that inevitably falls short in the face of prevailing conditions. At the same time, it continually strives to expand the boundaries of national inclusion to those on the margins of American life by its steady and gradual pursuit of social reform. Anthony Hutchinson has appealed to this liberal idea of society as constantly in transition toward a better, more progressive state of existence in order to illustrate Roth's disdain for the cultural Left in *The Human Stain*. For Hutchinson, Roth's opposition to Delphine's restrictive concept of marginal cultural identity as a "more or

less a fixed category" (160) is made on behalf of a notion of the self as fluid and transformable which reflects progressive liberal attitudes toward social change. He describes this liberal idea of subjectivity as one in which "the 'identity' of individuals and social groups is … seen as contingent and malleable – a product, primarily, of unequal economic relations that has in the past and can continue to be in the future reshaped by egalitarian political movements" (160). Although recognising the "limits" of "Silk's liberal-individualist project of self-sovereignty" (158), Hutchinson locates in Coleman's passing a welcome defiance of the entrenched and separatist notions of cultural origins that are inscribed by the theories and codes of political correctness. It is Coleman's rejection of any core or 'original' identity based upon his racial background in favour of a more "contingent and malleable" understanding of the self, according to Hutchinson, that registers Roth's loyalty to the progressive liberal model for cultural assimilation and self-advancement that dominated American life at mid-century.

Hutchinson does not discuss in any significant depth the manner in which Zuckerman's attempts to overcome his ethnic past is correlated with Coleman's act of racial passing. Despite this fact, it is possible to test Hutchinson's argument about Roth's support for a certain liberal idea in which subjectivity is tied to changing levels of social progress by reading it in the context of Zuckerman's conflicted sense of Jewish cultural identity, both in *The Human Stain* and elsewhere. As this thesis has repeatedly underlined, while Roth's fiction recognises the inerasable trauma of Jewish historical exclusion from the centre of American life for figures like Zuckerman, such an experience also engenders an undiminished longing for departure from those painfully limiting origins through acts of self-reinvention and processes of cultural assimilation. In this sense, the desire to re-locate oneself within broader ideas of mainstream culture is as much dependent upon as it is in tension with restraining notions of ethnic exclusivity or marginality in Roth's fiction. What this conflicted and paradoxical cycle of departure from and return to the traumatic site of origins achieves in the Zuckerman novels is to invoke the sense of an endlessly continuing, albeit always incomplete, passage of migration towards a wider notion of cultural belonging that exists beyond the confines of

his Jewish family home. In certain ways, this sense of being in constant transit between a confining world of Jewish origins and the more expansive territories of national and literary culture is reflective of the gradational process of assimilation that Hutchinson locates in progressive liberal politics. However, the crippling experience of reversal that Zuckerman's lingering sense of Jewish historical suffering brings to this migration from the margins to the centre of mainstream culture demonstrates how the desire for absolute assimilation or self-transformation is always hopelessly doomed in Roth's fiction. Instead of moving on a simple "trajectory outward," Zuckerman is perpetually forced backward and inward upon the various conflicts that are involved in his thwarted efforts to shed himself of his Jewish past.

While the phallic urge toward authorial mastery and creative self-reinvention is the dominating factor in Zuckerman's project of writing and Coleman's passing in *The Human Stain*, neither man is able to fully overcome the impotent sense of being already marked or authored as a liminal and incomplete (racial) subject. Throughout the American trilogy, figures such as Zuckerman, Ira, the Swede and Coleman all find in different ways a liberating sense of inclusion in the overriding spirit of progressive idealism that had given tremendous buoyancy to national life at mid-century. Yet for each of these characters, the trauma of his marginal origins ultimately contributes to the shattering of his sense of belonging to such a universalising and deracinated notion of 'American-ness.' The subject of Faunia and her non-white social status in *The Human Stain*, particularly as it reflects upon both Coleman and Zuckerman's marginal origins, provides a telling example of the eventual shortcomings involved in this once dominant liberal ideal of an inclusive American commonwealth. Although the values and conventions of whiteness provide Coleman with a means of passing beyond the historical limitations of his racial origins, they also mark a highly exclusionary model of American social and cultural inclusion for those who have as yet to pass themselves into this world of white middle class citizenship.

I have earlier mentioned how Faunia's notion of the "human stain" de-idealises the "fantasy of purity" (242) involved in Coleman's whiteness. What this chapter has tried to illustrate is how both Delphine's de-centred code of political correctness and the universalising model of white identity to which Coleman subscribes each involve their own "fantasy of purity." For Zuckerman, the prescriptive and proscriptive language of identity politics threatens to stifle the erotic quest to transform what is 'original' or 'real' about the self that is central to both his own sense of aesthetic purpose and Coleman's desire for self-authorship. At the same time, the notion of absolute self-mastery that is registered by the highly conventional guise of whiteness which Coleman adopts involves a similar negation of erotic desire. Like the Swede's pastoral or Murray's dispassionate moralising, Coleman's whiteness suggests a form of being complete or "intact" in which the creative desire to stretch the limits of what is 'real' has reached a stasis or plenum. In other words, Coleman's performance as a highly conventional white man is neutralised of the earlier sense of thanatological uncertainty ("nobody knows) that not only defined his experience as a racially marked subject, but which had given impetus to his burning desire for self-reinvention and impersonation in the first place. His erotic ambition to imaginatively re-draw the boundaries of the self, therefore, finds yet another form of thanatological contraction and limitation in the ideal of middle class citizenship with which Coleman comes to identify. This suffocating sense of subjectivity as completely formed and shorn of future possibilities for transformation is equally mirrored for Zuckerman in Delphine's rigid concept of the historically oppressed victim. Both means of conceptualising identity represent notions of "purity" in which the highly mutable, yet creative aspects of erotic intensity that have characterised Zuckerman's writing and his efforts at self-authorship are removed or "cleans[ed]." By contrast, the notion of the inerasable and impure "stain" in the novel is related to certain experiences of self-division and thwarted desire that attend the inassimilable trauma of Zuckerman's Jewish origins. In this regard, Roth is interested in the play of creative (erotic) possibilities and thanatological frustrations that define Zuckerman's repeated efforts to escape his Jewish family home and find a new origin within wider notions of cultural tradition. It is this sense of an endlessly incomplete passage of assimilation into mainstream cultural life –

as opposed to the apparently smooth transition from margin to centre involved in Coleman's passing from non-white to white – that shapes Roth's creative exploration of his hyphenated experience as a Jewish-American subject.

The End as Beginning and the Beginning as End: the Unfinished Cycle of Trauma in *The Plot against America* and *Exit Ghost*

The narrative of crisis and disillusionment in twentieth century American liberalism that so interests Roth in the American trilogy finds symbolic moments of 'beginning' and 'end' in *The Plot against America* and *Exit Ghost* respectively. *The Plot against America* provides an interesting look back at the epic heights achieved by the modern liberal dream of nationhood under Roosevelt's New Deal. *Exit Ghost*, by contrast, takes us forward to the Bush/Kerry election of 2004 and an American scene in which the once vibrant spirit of liberal progress that had so dominated the nation at mid-century has been all but completely vanquished. In *The Plot against America*, the progressive climate of the New Deal Era is evoked by blissful memories of childhood origins for its narrator, "Philip Roth." For the aged and decrepit Zuckerman of *Exit Ghost*, the ravages wrought upon him by sexual impotence and other such intimations of death reflect a steady evisceration of the once virile and unified sense of a national corpus that had been at the centre of Rooseveltian ideas about America as a collective commonwealth. In this sense, both of these novels could be said to offer a glimpse into the vast contrasts in the fortunes of progressive liberalism over a period of seventy years, marking out the devastating extent to which this formerly ascendant brand of national idealism has been shunted to the sidelines of political and cultural life in America at the beginning of the twenty first century. Placed together in this particular way, *The Plot against America* and *Exit Ghost* offer an interesting sense of the broad historical narrative of crisis and decline within modern liberalism that has already been partly re-traced by the novels of the American trilogy.

In the concluding discussion that follows, I wish to explore how this ostensible sense of an historical chronology in the American liberal narrative since Roosevelt, moving from heroic beginnings to tragic ends, is attenuated by the paradoxical experience of trauma in Roth's fiction. As I have already outlined in previous chapters, trauma is experienced in terms of disjunctive moments of re-enactment that never quite

reclaim the horrifying experience in its entirety, but through which the traumatised subject continues to repeatedly revisit the bewildering event in the hope of some day making it 'real' or comprehensible. As an event that persistently defies full understanding, therefore, trauma marks an experience which never quite begins and yet, at the same time, refuses to reach an end for the distraught victim. Both of the novels under study in this chapter adequately demonstrate how this sense of chronological distortion works in Roth's fiction. In particular, each book highlights how the ambitious forward trajectories mapped out by notions of historical progress and liberating forms of self-transformation are interrupted by the unending manner in which Roth's narrators find themselves both seeking departure from and a return to certain 'original' moments of unassimilated or traumatic experience.

In *The Plot against America*, Philip's secure and compact world of childhood origins in Roosevelt's America is subject to great upheaval by the "unforeseen" recurrence of a past trauma to which he is completely oblivious and thus hopelessly unprepared for. This sense of an unhealed wound relates back to the harrowing experiences of social exclusion that afflicted his parents' generation of American Jews, but which appeared to be erased from the collective memory as a result of the assimilatory opportunities afforded to ethnic minorities by the New Deal. Looking back on these troubling childhood experiences from a distance of over sixty years, Philip's memoir of events suggests how this moment of crisis and breakdown in his once assured sense of belonging to America continues to leave him scarred and bewildered. Still traumatised, he is rooted to a childhood past that he is unable to fully restore to all its pristine glory, before his unified sense of being both Jewish and American under Roosevelt began to fissure and come apart. Nor, for that matter, can he abandon his tarnished world of home and nation for a newly minted sense of origins. In *Exit Ghost*, Zuckerman continues to discuss how his hermetic form of isolation has served as an attempt to leave behind the traumatic experience of living in a dis-jointed world in which his political idealism and literary aspirations have been subject to bitter dispute and frustration. However, by once more re-entering the turbulence of daily existence in

New York City on the eve of the 2004 Presidential Election, Zuckerman is forced to realise that the more youthful conflicts and disappointments from which he has sought refuge in later life are still remarkably fresh and unresolved in old age.

In both of these novels, as in each volume of the American trilogy, the sense of political expectations and social opportunities that had been enshrined by values of progressive liberalism in America between the 1930s and 1960s are subject to a catastrophic sense of traumatic reversal and disillusionment. These shared experiences of trauma find no satisfactory completion or end for Roth's protagonists, but continue to be rehearsed and replayed by each of them in a desperate effort to make their personal sense of involvement with American history more understandable. This notion of history as a trauma that is constantly re-enacting itself in the present and reaching beyond into the unlived future unites the historically separated experiences of Philip in *The Plot against America* and Zuckerman in *Exit Ghost*. Philip's fabled moment of heightened beginnings is subject to an early and crippling experience of "unforeseen" shock that finds distinct reverberations through Zuckerman's more jaded sense of having endured a lifetime of being exasperated and at odds with the ways in which American political and cultural life has developed since mid-century. In other words, both Philip's happy recollections of his childhood origins during the New Deal and Zuckerman's intimations of death and futility in 2004 are actually united by a shared cycle of repeating trauma within modern American liberalism that appears to exist in a continuous and unceasing fashion which defies clearly separable and chronological coordinates of origin or end. The end-of-days despair over the failure of progressive liberalism to wrest the nation from the populist ideology of the Right in *Exit Ghost* thus marks an uncanny repetition of the trauma that scars the glorious epoch of Rooseveltian origins evoked by Philip's happy childhood memories in *The Plot against America*.

The "unfolding of the unforeseen": the Crisis of New Deal Optimism in *The Plot against American*

The Plot against America takes for its subject a counterfactual historical scenario which envisages the defeat of Roosevelt in the 1940 Presidential election by the isolationist and Nazi sympathiser, Charles Lindbergh, who, instead of taking America into war, signs a peace accord with Hitler's Germany. Roth's novel charts the bewildering changes to family life experienced by his protagonist, 9 year old "Philip Roth," amid escalating fears within the broader Jewish community over the Lindbergh Administration's hinted overtures to residual feelings of anti-Semitism in America. In an interview following its publication, Roth explains the strategy behind his novel's counterfactual technique:

> Orwell imagined a huge change in the future with horrendous consequences for everyone; I tried to imagine a small change in the past with horrendous consequences for a relative few. He imagined a dystopia, I imagined a uchronia ("The Story Behind *The Plot against America*")

The narrative is structured around the recollections of an aged Philip, who recalls how the safe environs of his childhood world were made gradually more perilous by a growing atmosphere of fear and discord that was offset within his home and community by the emergence to power of Lindbergh. The hysteria bred by a sense of imminent displacement from the mainstream of American life among the Jews of Newark's Summit Avenue under Lindbergh's reign is sharply contrasted with idyllic memories of Philip's family setting during Roosevelt's Presidency. In this way, calamitous historical events in *The Plot against America* take the form of Philip's Edenic Fall from a state of childish innocence to an understanding of the contingency and mutability of life within "the unfolding of the unforeseen" (113).

What the imagined nightmare of a Lindbergh Presidency offers Roth is a means by which to investigate the core Rooseveltian foundations of Philip's childhood sense of origins, once they have been subject to the strain and conflicts engendered by an alien

environment. The anguished experience of reversal that Roosevelt's defeat brings to Philip's childhood romance with America involves a shattering of the happy unity between both his national and familial sense of belonging. As in previous works, growing tensions between a parochial sense of Jewish ethnic allegiance and wider notions of American cultural belonging for Philip in *The Plot against America* are dramatised in terms of a declining faith in paternal authority and a symbolic break from the protective confines of home. Perhaps more so than in his other novels, however, Roth accentuates the crippling experience of loss and pain involved in the dwindling sense of parental assurance and guidance for the still very young Philip. However, the sense of great sorrow incurred as a result of Philip's traumatic ordeal in the novel is attended by early signs of his growing aesthetic sensibility, the full maturation of which can be witnessed in the memoir that he provides us with more than sixty years later. Therefore, in ways that signal a variation on a recurring thematic in Roth's literature, the painful break with familial origins is directly linked to the creative birth of the self as author in *The Plot against America*.

Similar to the Weequahic section of Newark that Zuckerman recalls in *American Pastoral*, Philip's childhood neighbourhood in *The Plot against America* is described as an idyllic environment, buoyed by the rewards of successful Jewish assimilation into the mainstream of American life. Like the Swede, Philip is the Jewish-American Adam who is born free from the weight of historical suffering experienced by his grandparents and parents. Innocently removed from the struggles and privations of the past, Philip lives happily within the paradisiacal environment of Summit Avenue where the "very gutters gushed with the elixir of life" (209). This joyous haven is described in the novel as the hard won achievement of parents, whose memories of their harsh social experience as the children of marginalised Jewish immigrants made them eager to protect their own offspring from the ravages of historical suffering. Bess and Herman Roth's determination "to contain the uncertainty and the anxiety and the anger and operate according to the dictates of reason" (300) has sheltered Philip from any knowledge of the reversals and uncertainties associated with their own past. The "child's peacetime

illusion of an eternal, unhounded now" (225) that Philip recalls from his pre-Lindbergh life thus takes on aspects of what Bakhtin described as "the valorized past of beginnings and peak times" (19). This epic notion of origins is underlined by the self-integrated image of a community whose inhabitants "were very similar people at the core" (219). The seemingly uncomplicated acculturation into American society by his parents and their fellow second generation Jews on Summit Avenue thus bears no visible trace of the difficult marginality or hyphenated self-divisions indicative of Jewish-American subjectivity elsewhere in Roth's fiction: "[t]heir being Jews issued from being themselves, as did their being American" (220).

The material and psychological benefits of such a smooth form of cultural integration for Jewish-Americans is inextricably linked to the figure of Roosevelt and the principles of the New Deal in *The Plot against America*. As I will outline in more detail below, the language of the New Deal proffered a vision of socio-economic security and national cultural unity that promised to usher the American people out of the historical calamity of the Great Depression. It fostered an optimistic spirit of national renewal and values of collective co-operation, in an attempt to legislate against the future possibility of a similar socio-economic catastrophe. Much like the post-war liberal consensus that succeeded it, the progressive ideal of guaranteed future security which the Roosevelt Administration offered to American citizens was structured upon various "balancing acts" (Cooney, 1995 xv) that sought to reasonably harmonise sources of economic and social conflict in America. Related to the notion of "economic morality" (Second Inaugural Speech, paragraph 11) by which Roosevelt "determined to make every American citizen the subject of his country's interest and concern" (paragraph 29) was an ideal of social inclusiveness that encouraged an acceptance of and respect toward America's many people of different ethnic origins. In *The Plot against America*, Philip's childhood is defined by certain ideas and tropes that characterise key values of the New Deal vision of compromise between conflicting social and economic forces in America. Roosevelt is fictionalised as a benevolent, avuncular figurehead for the American "common man" in the text, whose broadcasts over the radio are delivered in a

personalised tone that provides a welcoming balm of re-assurance to the greater public, most particularly the Jews of Summit Avenue. However, the rational ideas of historical progress that underwrite the Roth family's assured sense of full American citizenship in the novel is made suddenly uncertain, once Roosevelt is defeated by the more aloof and taciturn Lindbergh, "the rugged individualist" (30).

Whereas Philip describes "that huge endowment of personal security that I had taken for granted as an American child of American parents" (7) before Roosevelt's electoral defeat, it is "perpetual fear" (1) that dominates his experiences subsequent to the arrival of Lindbergh onto the stage of political history. The anxiety and horror that lay behind "two years of helplessly absorbing every rumour … [and] never being able to justify either their alarm or their composure with hard fact" (244) for Philip's community in the novel is never fully matched by the outcome of events. Following only two years as President, Lindbergh literally disappears from the historical scene. With his vice-President disgraced, Roosevelt is re-instated to executive power and leads America into war against the Axis nations. Yet as Roth himself has mentioned, it is the crippling fear of persecution expressed by the Newark Jews, rather than any actual act of oppression or exclusion made by the Lindbergh Administration, which serves as the primary focus of the novel: "[w]hat matters in my book isn't what he [Lindbergh] does … but what American Jews suspect, rightly or wrongly, that he might be capable of doing given his public utterances" ("The Story Behind *The Plot against America*"). I will explore in more detail below how the anxieties that arose among Philip's parents and their neighbours by the presence of Lindbergh in The White House recall an earlier trauma of Jewish social exclusion in America, which appeared to have been completely buried by their sense of unhindered accession into wider national life under Roosevelt. Despite the triumphal moment of Jewish acculturation into the American mainstream outlined by Philip's blissful childhood memories in the novel, *The Plot against America* investigates how such a dormant and unfinished trauma is horrifyingly re-visited in the moment of profound historical crisis offset by Lindbergh's Presidency.

Before discussing further *The Plot against America*, I wish to offer a brief outline of how historians have assessed the New Deal as not just the cornerstone of modern American liberalism, but as the troubled site of contradictions and tensions upon which that very liberal vision of a progressive social compact between different sectional interests would become torn apart in later decades. According to many commentators, New Deal efforts to protect the wider public welfare against the vicissitudes of a *laissez faire* market through a rational state organisation of the economy did help to foster a greater sense of material and psychological security among Americans in this period. David Kennedy, for example, mentions how "security was the leitmotif of virtually everything the New Deal attempted" (365). Similarly, Wendy Wall has discussed how "President Roosevelt and his New Dealers" helped to promote the notion of "an 'American Way' built around the twin pillars of majoritarian democracy and economic security for all Americans" (6). Michael Szalay has argued that the New Deal witnessed the birth of a radically new concept of the liberal subject based upon ideas of collective "Social Security [that] made the state not an instrument of co-ordinated economic planning but rather a system of exchange essentially compensatory for human experience" (2). Yet as Szalay's reference to a Keynesian "system of exchange" between the market and the state suggests, this drive toward some form of material security for all citizens – which would later morph into a notion of mass prosperity during the post-war liberal consensus – was made somewhat unstable by contradictions between the New Deal's interest in re-stimulating American capitalist values of individual initiative and its more left-leaning notions about public welfare and the protection of labour.

Various people have discussed how the New Deal's "abundant promiscuities, inconsistencies, contradictions, inconstancies, and failures" (Kennedy, 364-5) originated from these overriding tensions in its outlook between capitalist individualism and state corporatism; divisive economic competition and government assured security. Richard Hofstadter, for example, provided an early assessment of the New Deal as "a series of improvisations, many adopted very suddenly, many contradictory" (327). For Alan

Brinkley, the "New Deal [was] a confusing amalgam of ideas and impulses – a program that seemed to have something in it to please everyone except those who sought a discernible ideological foundation for it" (18). Elsewhere, Robert Edsforth has described how "Roosevelt was trying to lift the psychological burden that American individualism imposed on the poor," while, at the same time, "paving the way for reform in the capitalist system that would prevent a future depression" (53). According to Terry Cooney, the New Deal was characterised by a "desire to move in more than one direction, to have it both ways, to live with or to resolve contradictions" (1995, xiv). He provides an interesting examination of the "balancing acts" by which such New Deal policies as public work relief "aspired to defend the traditional emphasis on individual responsibility as much as to escape its harsher implications" (50). As my earlier discussions of the problems facing American liberalism after World War Two have suggested, such contradictions and tensions within the Rooseveltian liberal model would become increasingly exacerbated during later periods.

In a decidedly leftist stance that exemplifies how a later generation would come to criticise and abandon the liberal compromises established by Roosevelt, historian Barton J. Bernstein's argues that the New Deal provided an ultimately hollow vision of radical hope. He describes the Rooseveltian promise of great social and economic change as one in which: "marginal men trapped in hopelessness were seduced by rhetoric, by the style and movement, by the symbolism of efforts seldom reaching beyond words" (35-6). The highly persuasive forms of "rhetoric" and "symbolism" that Bernstein critically refers to in this instance were highly instrumental to the New Deal's populist notions of cultural integration and commonweal spirit. Described by Cooney as "unifying metaphors" (2005, 197), the various images of mass co-operation that the Roosevelt Administration employed in defending the plight of the "common man" were expressed also in terms of a cultural togetherness between the nation's diverse social and ethnic groups, many of which had inhabited a marginal space in American life prior to this point. Cooney explains how "the presence of different groups and values in American culture became evidence of a unifying national commitment, and, by

extension, ameliorative treatment of conflicts among the parts verified the presence of an enlightened understanding of the whole" (98).

As I have already been indicating, Roth's novel draws upon this ideal of common cultural purpose in his portrayal of an idyllic Jewish community in *The Plot against America*, before the arrival onto the political scene of Lindbergh. Myron Scholnick explains that "Jews gained a desperately needed feeling of acceptance as steadfast partners in a popular struggle for national redemption" (19) under the New Deal. Yet in a manner that has important echoes for Roth's novel, Scholnick stresses that such a moment of assimilation for American Jews was not without its trials and uncertainties. He mentions how certain forms of "extremist reaction to that reform movement [the New Deal]" were accompanied by "the greatest outburst of anti-Semitism the nation had yet experienced" (2). Roth's novel not only explores how such a glaring inconsistency to the liberal notion of a united Republic under Roosevelt existed, but also looks ahead to other similar divisions that would come to tear asunder the mid-century myth of national consensus and accord. As Wendy Wall argues, the idea of a unifying national spirit has since become subject to many bitter contesting notions about cultural life in America. She explains that "[c]ompeting attempts to define core American values" by both "[p]roponents and critics of affirmative action, abortion restrictions, gay marriage, welfare and immigration reform, and a host of other issues" (12) in contemporary public debates have witnessed the fracturing of any dream of common cultural understanding. It is this disintegration of the liberal version of a collectively shared American dream, as the previous chapters to this thesis attest, which has provided an important historical context for Roth's fiction.

Cooney has mentioned how the New Deal's populist celebration "of a country disparate and diverse in nature became a proclamation of common loyalty to the nation's traditional political ideals" (1995, 173). Similarly, Lawson has argued that the "ideal of a cooperative commonwealth" was, in part, fostered by an "effort to link day-to-day living with myth and historical destiny" (137). It is this sense of democratic inheritance

and progressive historical destiny in America that is made precarious for Philip's family by events in *The Plot against America*. The uneasy coalition of diverse social groups involved in the New Deal's unifying cultural vision is explored by tensions that arise between the Roths' claim to a sense of American historical entitlement and their growing exposure to anti-Semitism while on a family vacation to Washington. Philip explains how this quasi-pilgrimage to the shrines of American democratic grandeur in the Capital is designed by his parents "to convince Sandy and me ... that nothing had changed other than that FDR was no longer in office" (5). By way of dramatising the tensions that become exposed in the Roth family's conflicting experience as both mainstream Americans and marginalised Jews under Lindbergh's tenure as President, the narrative of their trip to Washington is infused by a sharpened sense of dialogic conflict. In one sense, Philip's impressions of the various totemic symbols of American democratic prowess demonstrate the seductive quality of a heroic national history to a child whose stamp collection – celebrating great American figures and places – represents "nine tenths of his knowledge of the world" (67). By contrast, the family's stay in Washington heightens their growing fears of social exclusion, as evidenced by two separate incidences in which the vociferously patriotic and pro-Roosevelt Herman is made subject to anti-Semitic epithets. The contrasting attitudes of Philip's parents help to dramatise the family's nervous ambivalence about their continued sense of inclusion in the national culture. The vitality of Herman's enthusiasm for their tour of Washington and what it represents in terms of their identity as Americans is tempered by Bess's many bouts of anxiety regarding the family's immediate safety. Breaking down with worry at one stage, much to the bewilderment of Philip who has been buoyed by his father's patriotic optimism, she explains to her children: "it isn't like living in a normal country anymore" (59).

The various symbols of national history that Washington contains become contested sites upon which the Roth family discover a fractured sense of both their membership in and displacement from a triumphal American lineage. For example, on first looking at the Lincoln Memorial, Philip describes "the sculpted face ... [as] the face

of God and the face of America all in one" (63). He goes on to explain how "there was no defense, for either an adult or a child, against the [monument's] solemn atmosphere of hyperbole" (63). However, Philip's wondrous sense of historical pride and belonging soon gives way to dread as his father's vocal support for Roosevelt and the New Deal is met with a hostile response from another man standing nearby, who labels Herman "a loudmouth Jew" (65). Immediately following this incident, Philip recalls how "it was impossible to [longer] feel the raptures of patriotism turning me inside out" (66) that he had experienced just moments earlier. The uncertainty that Philip begins to experience in relation to his American birthright is best expressed by a line that he delivers on recalling the vista from the Lincoln Memorial to the Washington Monument: "[i]t was the most beautiful panorama I'd ever seen, a patriotic paradise, the American Garden of Eden spread before us, and we stood huddled there, the family excluded" (66). It is only when told that Martha Washington was the first woman to appear on a stamp, referring him back to the America that he knows as a philatelist, that Philip feels "all the complications of our being a Jewish family in Lindbergh's America simply vanished" (74). He describes the similarities between this resumed sense of confidence in his identity as an American and "the way I felt in school when, at the start of an assembly program, you rose to your feet and sang the national anthem, giving it everything you had" (74). However, the various explicit acts and suggested hints of prejudice that the Roth family are subject to while in Washington indicate that such patriotic fervour may be no more than the product of a "hyperbole," which works to disguise the sharp sense of cultural and ethnic divisions beneath their growing fears of exclusion from the centre of American life.

New Deal attempts to protect the material interests and restore the psychological confidence of the American "common man" following the catastrophic upheavals of the Depression involved a concerted valorisation of the virtues and dignity of work over the purely financial considerations of profit. In his First Inaugural Address, Roosevelt encapsulates this idea by warning that: "[t]he joy and moral stimulation of work no longer must be forgotten in the mad chase of evanescent profits" ("First Inaugural

Address, paragraph 7). As Cooney points out, this elevation of economic labour to a form of spiritual pursuit invoked historical myths of the frontier, out of which were drawn "a presumably characteristic American affinity for hard work and self-reliance" (1995, 181). Work performs as a keystone to the world constructed by Philip's parents in *The Plot against America*, acting as a passport in the cultural migration of second-generation Jewish immigrants into a broader experience of what it means to be American. As Philip explains: "[i]t was work that identified and distinguished our neighbors for me far more than religion" (3). However, the New Deal's uncomplicated and universalised concept of work as a heroic American cultural value – the means of not just material, but also moral well-being – elided a certain amount of the usual economic antagonisms between labour and capital. As I have discussed at length in chapter two, this politically neutralised ideal of labour finds distinct echoes through the connections made between factory labour and artisan manufacturing by Lou and the Swede in *American Pastoral*. Such an uncontested notion of work reflects the New Deal struggle to balance legislation that protected the rights of American labour with efforts at encouraging the capitalist spirit of "energetic individualism" (Cooney, 1995 185), deemed necessary for economic revival during the Depression. As an important foundation to the blissful life secured for Philip by his parents, this New Deal ideology of work becomes exposed to its underlying contradictions and limitations, once historical events begin to make his childhood world uncertain.

The way in which core New Deal values of work are made subject to strain in the novel is evidenced by Herman's refusal at one stage to accept the prospect of a lucrative job promotion, out of fear that the requirement to re-locate his family to a non-Jewish neighbourhood might involve exposing them to anti-Semitic prejudices. Although the prospect of Herman becoming a branch assistant manager is described by Philip as something "that, above all, would answer a Depression family's yearning for a tiny margin of financial security," his parents balk at the potential dangers of moving away from Summit Avenue and into a "Gentile working-class town" (8). Philip describes how his father's well rehearsed platitudes about how hard work and initiative act as the

guarantors of American democratic advancement are made vulnerable by this fearful decision not to accept his greatest financial opportunity yet:

> At the dinner table, my father would reiterate to his young sons time and again, "If anybody asks 'Can you do this job? Can you handle it?' you tell 'em 'Absolutely.' By the time they find out that you can't, you'll already have learned, and the job'll be yours. And who knows, it just might turn out to be the opportunity of a lifetime." Yet over in New York he had done nothing like that (11)

Later in the novel, after having resisted the efforts of Lindberg's Office of American Absorption to make the family relocate among the wider Gentile population, Herman is eventually forced to leave his job. As a result, he becomes declassed from his role as a white-collar insurance salesman to one of manual labourer at his brother, Monty's wholesale firm. Herman's new "blue collar" routine of "slugging down his shot" of alcohol and sleeping at inordinate times leaves Philip "dumbfounded … by the abrupt decline in my father's vocational status" (238). By the end of the novel, Herman's vaunted New Deal concept of the moral relationship between hard work and self-advancement suffers its final humiliation when Monty decides to sack him. Monty's unsentimental mode of competitive entrepreneurialism brings to light the contradictions involved in his and Herman's shared, second generation immigrant attitude to work as the ultimate means of self-improvement in America. In an effort to delineate these tensions, Philip outlines the differences between his father and his uncle:

> it was enough for him [Herman] to make something (rather than everything) of himself and to do so without wrecking the lives around him. My father was born to contend but also to protect, and to inflict damage on an enemy didn't make his spirits soar as it did his older brother's (123)

Herman embodies a Rooseveltian ideal in which his self-interests are mutually beneficial with the material well-being of others. As one of "the brutal entrepreneurial *machers*" (123), Monty, by contrast, holds an attitude to work and personal profit that is far more aggressively self-seeking. In contrast with the reasoned liberal impulses by which Herman attempts to reform Philip's wayward cousin, Alvin, Monty approaches the problem of their errant nephew with the aggression of "[b]ullies [who] love to summarize" (152). Far less considerate than his brother about the various disadvantages

and setbacks that have shaped Alvin's behaviour, Monty reminds him bluntly that there "is nothing you have earned" (152).

Such contested divisions within this seemingly coherent ideal of work as the means of social opportunity and individual achievement in America find further evidence during the fractious dinner table debates between Herman and Alvin. These arguments are focused around Alvin's future and the opportunity that is afforded to him by working as a personal driver for Abe Steinheim, a local construction mogul. Whereas Herman brandishes Steinheim with the heroic epithets of "colourful," "exciting" and "genius" (46), Alvin sees him as "a bully," "a swindler" and "without a friend in the world" (47). Arguing, we are told, "not like a member of the National Association of Manufacturers but as a devotee of Roosevelt's New Deal" (47), Herman sees Steinheim's success as the deserved product of hard endeavour. By contrast, Alvin – who is labelled a Marxist by Herman and, therefore, seen by his uncle as contrary to the compromising sprit of the New Deal – insists that "avarice" and "staggering arrogance" (47) lie at the heart of Steinheim's business accomplishments. Yet, in an ironic twist, it is Alvin who later comes to embody this notion of capitalism as underhand and driven by egotistical self-interest, much anathema to Herman's Rooseveltian ideal of a system of fair play and honest toil. It is his transformation from being the family's ethical consciousness into the role of "sharpie" or petty crook that makes Alvin attractive as a protégé to Steinheim. In this sense, he comes to display what Mr. Patimkin in "Goodbye, Columbus" saw as the businessman's "need [for] a little of the *gonif* in you" (67). This connection between thievery and business is made complete by the novel's close, when Alvin develops completely, via the nefarious dealings of organised crime in Philapelphia, into the role of legitimate and successful businessman.

Throughout the novel, Philip reflects upon a family environment in which his parents regulated against the experiences of fear and uncertainty that had pervaded their own childhood world of immigrant hardship. He describes how his father's "relentless passion ... brought to the struggle against setback and disappointment" was reinforced by

his mother's efforts "to hold our world together as calmly and sensibly as she could" (40). In many ways, Bess and Herman's dedication to "patiently reasoning" (47) the outcome of events reflects on the micro-level of family and local community the wider progressive faith of the New Deal in the ability of people to shape and steer their lives along rationally forecasted and ameliorative lines. However, the contagion of fear bred among the Summit Avenue Jews by Lindbergh's Presidency works to tear down the "sheltering wall of legal assurances standing between them and the derangements of a ghetto" (338). The nervous reaction of the Roth family and their neighbours to this "unforeseen" crisis thus marks a reversal in the hopeful sense of historical progression by which American Jews had come to identify fully with the wider nation under Roosevelt. Such a "malignant transformation" (57) gives rise in Roth's novel to the demotic underside of Roosevelt's reassuring declaration that: "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyses needed efforts to convert retreat into advance" (First Inaugural Address, paragraph 1). Amid this atmosphere of growing collective alarm, the cautious rationalism and observed pieties that once governed the Roth household are superseded by various manifestations of angst and febrile emotionalism. For the unsuspecting Philip, such incidents bring about a cataclysmic and traumatising end to his once cosseted world of childhood innocence.

The horrifying changes brought to Philip's secure and peaceful environment by wider historical events finds evidence in Herman's uncharacteristic turn towards physical aggression in the novel, in a hopeless effort to restore his dwindling sense of authority at home. Philip recalls with anguish how his father struck him in retaliation for attending the cinema newsreel which his parents had forbidden him to watch, for fear that the news events about Lindbergh would further unnerve the increasingly worried child: "for the first time ever, [he] wallops me, without restraint, across the face" (203). Such an unexpected outburst of violence finds an even more alarming example when the persuasive mode of reasoning by which Herman attempts to guide Alvin in the right direction gives way to frustration and anger. Having witnessed his father violently attack his cousin, Philip explains that:

> I'd had no idea my father was so well suited for wreaking havoc or equipped to make that lightning-quick transformation from sanity to lunacy that is indispensable in enacting the unbridled urge to destroy. Unlike Uncle Monty he preferred never to speak of the ordeal of a Jewish tenement kid on Runyon Street before World War One (293)

Following the brawl that ensues between Herman and Alvin, Philip describes the sense of "abashment" that his father experiences "over everything he'd mismanaged and badly misjudged, including the improbable violence that had smashed to bits, along with our coffee table, that lifelong barrier of rigid rectitude that had stood between his harsh upbringing and his mature ideals" (301). In an environment of intensifying fear and uncertainty, Herman feels increasingly incapable of guiding and protecting those he loves. The forceful brand of "lecturing and hectoring love" (296) that he had wielded as the authoritative, yet caring, patriarch gives way to disappointment and rage In this way, Herman's "mature" liberal principles of peacefully resolving differences through strength of reason are torn asunder by the re-surfacing of certain irrational instincts for anxiety and frustration that relate back to the buried experiences of the Jewish immigrant past.

The disillusioning sense of reversal in his parents' efforts to rationally construct a life for Philip that is free from the psychological strife associated with their own past experiences of social exclusion as American Jews is compounded by Bess's numerous bouts of emotional crisis throughout the novel. Philip recalls with great sadness how her function as the maternal protector "who performed each day in methodical opposition to life's unruly flux" (341) is made redundant by the capricious turn of events during Lindbergh's Presidency:

> What it came down to for the child who was watching her being battered about by the most anguishing confusion (and who was himself quaking with fear) was the discovery that one could do nothing right without also doing something wrong, so wrong, in fact, that especially where chaos reigned and everything was at stake, one might be better off to wait and do nothing - except that to do nothing was also to do something (340-1)

The peculiar circumstances surrounding the advent to power of Lindbergh thus signal a disabling reversal in the highly assured sense of social and cultural advancement within Philip's Jewish community under Roosevelt. As a result of the various calamitous events in the novel, the Roth family are re-acquainted with the trauma of Bess and Herman's long abandoned, "ghetto" origins as the children of marginalised Jews. Although the meticulous manner in which his parents sheltered Philip from any knowledge of this trauma was fundamental to his blissful childhood experience, it also left him hopelessly unprepared for the devastating impact of events surrounding Lindbergh's Presidency. With a still raw sense of disappointment, the aged Philip reflects upon how the world of protection and safety that his parents provided for him had amounted to nothing more than: "a cunning deception perpetrated to soften us up with rational expectations and foster nonsensical feelings of trust" (353).

Sexual desire is largely absent from Philip's pre-pubescent world of childhood innocence. However, as that idyllic environment becomes subject to various forms of distraught emotion, there are indications of the sexual knowledge to which the child Philip will become eventually aware. Having witnessed his father's violent attack on Alvin, the aged narrator reflects that: "[p]rior to that night, it would have been as impossible for me to imagine him beating someone up … as to imagine him atop my mother" (294). By its very absence, erotic desire lingers on the margins of Philip's narrative as an imminent adjunct to the world fraught by anguish and fear that is developing before him. As my previous chapters have highlighted, this idea of the relationship between desire and traumatic experiences of loss or suffering is central to Roth's fiction. The shattering experience of trauma that is visited upon Philip's paradisiacal sense of childhood finds an important example in the case of his cousin Alvin, who, having lost a leg while fighting for Canadian forces against the Nazis, returns to live once more with the Roth family. On returning home, Alvin's amputee condition is worsened by the added emotional deformities of regret and rage that render him unrecognisable to the spirited political idealist who defied not just fascism and Lindbergh's policy of isolationism, but the stern and protective warnings of Philip's

father by going to war. The nurse who attends Alvin on his journey back to Newark attempts to explain to Philip and his brother, Sandy – "two protected children entirely ignorant of the bitterness of loss" (130) – the reason for their cousin's considerable change in mood and behaviour. To Sandy's question regarding the object of Alvin's new sense of outrage, she replies: "[a]t what people get angry at – at how things turn out." (130). When Philip discovers Alvin masturbating in the cellar of the family home, the suggested link between loss and sexual longing in the novel finds its most pointed expression. Although he "didn't [as yet] know what masturbation was" (148), Philip intuitively makes a connection between his cousin's bewildered rage over the loss of his leg and the unfamiliar act. On discovering Alvin's ejaculated semen on the cellar wall, Philip remarks: "I imagined it was something that festered in a man's body and then came spurting from his mouth when he was completely consumed by grief" (148).

Alvin's return furthers the growing experience of bewilderment and unease wrought by the sudden and horrifying changes in Philip's ordered sense of the world. Described by his older narrating self as being "yet altogether too young to know the potential of a rage of one's own" (24), Philip is perplexed by his cousin's unrecognisably altered state. Philip's discomfort with these changes is exacerbated by the news that he will have to share his bedroom with Alvin and the hideous "stump" left by the amputation of his leg from just below the knee. Such close proximity to the emotionally and physically scarred Alvin strikes fear in Philip, who, in recalling the early stages of his cousin's return, explains that: "I hadn't as yet had to look at the stump and could pretend I didn't know it was there" (136). However, Philip's initial horror with Alvin's injury soon diminishes as he begins to act as an aid by helping him dress his wound. Philip's growing familiarity and fascination with the grotesque stump coincides with his exposure to the various upheavals that are having a catastrophic effect upon his secure sense of home and community. As the root cause of why Alvin has become so "crazily agitated" (136), his amputated leg works as a metaphor for the psychological experience of trauma that wreaks havoc upon Philip's childhood in *The*

Plot against America. On first glimpsing the scar left by his cousin's wound, Philip explains that:

> What I saw was what the word "stump" describes: the blunt remnant of something whole that belonged there and once had been there (136)

This image of the stump evokes the notion of trauma as a moment of overwhelming suffering that appears to have had an unregistered or "blunt" impact on its victim, but yet which also renders the traumatised subject with an incomprehensible sense of loss and disintegration. Looking closely at the wound, Philip describes how the "skin was rounded off softly at the abbreviated end as though it were nature's handiwork and not the result of a trying sequence of medical amputations" (136). This minute fascination with Alvin's injury suggests that, like the paradoxical structure of trauma, the painful experience of loss involved in the amputation is both elided and yet made visible at the same time by the physical lineaments of the scar.

Philip begins to obsess over Alvin's amputated limb, in an attempt to overcome the traumatic impact that it has brought upon his home and the lives within it. With the assistance of his mother, he devises various aids and schemes to facilitate Alvin's handicap and help him "forget about his prosthesis" (145). However, Philip's determination to overcome this new and frightening experience of loss by restoring not just Alvin, but his own world of family and home to its original state of integrity proves futile. The various harrowing events by which his once secure world is torn apart thus comprise an irreversible or insurmountable trauma for Philip, who finally develops a "rage of one's own" by the novel's close. In particular, the inadvertent role that he plays in the deportation of Seldon Wishnow and his mother to Kentucky, as part of Lindbergh's Homestead 42 initiative for assimilating Jews among the wider Gentile populace, continues to be a cause of irresolvable and painful regret for the aged Philip. Having relayed the story of Mrs. Wishnow's death at the hands of an anti-Semitic mob in Kentucky, he recalls with biting sorrow and remorse how: "I did it … [t]hat was all I could think then and all I can think now" (336).

Roth's text is suffused by examples of how the young Philip becomes exposed to various disputatious voices and contrasting speech patterns, once his unified idea of the world is made subject to the discordant effects of Lindbergh's Presidency. Throughout the book, he demonstrates a growing sensitivity to and fascination with differences in syntax and intonation that contrast with the usual speech rhythms of a home-life, in which "hardly anyone in the vicinity spoke with an accent" (4). For example, following Sandy's return from Kentucky as a volunteer for Lindbergh's Just Folks Program, Philip is struck by the accentuation of "the drawl and the twang" (92) newly acquired by his older brother. Partly mesmerised by this "extraordinary … regional accent" (92), Philip also appears to be unnerved by "that concoction of English … [that] wasn't what we natives of New Jersey spoke" (93). This ambivalence towards the alien dialect and accent newly acquired by his older brother reflects the bitter conflict in Philip's home between his father and Sandy over the latter's involvement in Just Folks. Sandy's changing speech thus combines lyrical appeal with a frightening challenge to his father's authority for Philip. His ambivalent attitude toward Sandy's unfamiliar style of speech finds echoes in Philip's reaction to Alvin's "new ostentatious way of talking" (289), following the latter's transformation from anti-Nazi socialist to petty hoodlum. Despite the fact that Alvin's "new vocabulary … clearly pained my parents to hear" (289), Philip explains how he was seduced by the illicit style of his cousin's rhetoric: "I couldn't wait to sound like a hard guy myself by repeating the amazing expression at school along with the extensive medley of slang that Alvin now used just for the word 'money'" (289). The young boy's desire to mimic Alvin's speech and, thereby, transgress the borders of what his parents might consider appropriate is reflective of what I have earlier discussed as Roth's broader interest in fiction as a form of impersonation and betrayal. Philip demonstrates a similar excitement in imitating the speech of his new Italian neighbour, Mr. Cucuzza: "his accent was so enjoyable to hear that when I was alone I sometimes pretended that the way he talked was the way I talked too" (283). The great pleasure that Philip takes from such acts of mimicry resounds in the overall structure of a narrative which re-inscribes the plethora of diverse and contesting voices that he was

exposed to as a child. Yet, as I have been suggesting, the thrill of listening to these different voices is accompanied by experiences of dread and fear over the breakdown of Philip's known sense of the world. The transformations in Alvin's dialect, for example, can be traced to the conflicts between him and Herman that have helped shatter the Roth family's sense of cohesion. Similarly, Mr. Cucuzza's presence on Summit Avenue is the result of an enforced relocation by Lindbergh's Office of American Absorptions, as part of its broader efforts to manufacture a cultural mix between Jews and Gentiles.

Witnessing first hand the various familial disputes that occur in the aftermath of Lindbergh's election, Philip is beleaguered by the extent to which the language of authoritative elders, both at home and in the Jewish community at large, is suddenly made questionable and exposed to disharmony. Such a conflict of authority is suitably dramatised by the visit to the Roth home of the pro-Lindbergh Rabbi Bengelsdorf, affianced to Philip's Aunt Evelyn. Bengelsdorf is a noted and erudite figure among the Jews of Summit Avenue, who Philip describes as having spoken "so softly that at times you had to hold your breath to hear how learned he was" (103). However, his proselytising for Lindbergh's Office of American Absorption is met by a robust, albeit less articulate, counter argument from Philip's father. At one point, Philip presents this clash of opinions by imagining Evelyn's contemptuous reaction to her "shallow brother-in-law [, who] dared to oppose with his piddling vocabulary a scholar who could talk in ten languages" (110). Philip acts as the ventriloquist here, assuming the voice of his socially ambitious aunt in a way that is consistent with her unsympathetic portrayal throughout the novel. However, in recalling the eloquence of the Rabbi's speech, Philip partly shares in Evelyn's deference toward Bengelsdorf as a figure of intellectual authority: "[a] pouring forth of sentences as informed as these had never before occurred at our dining table or probably anywhere on our block" (111). On one level, Philip appears to maintain a fondness for his father's more vernacular and democratically toned defiance of Lindbergh's propaganda in this particular scene. Yet there is also a suggestion that the young auditor is, in part, convinced by Bengelsdorf's argument that Newark Jews should openly embrace the cultural opportunities provided by the Office of

American Absorption. As a result of this warring incident between these two towering figures of Jewish patriarchal authority, the young and highly impressionable Philip is left anxiously confused and self-divided:

> I had to put on my one tie and my one jacket to impress the very rabbi who helped to elect the president whose friend was Hitler. How could I not be confused, when our disgrace and our glory were one and the same? Something essential had been destroyed and lost (107-8)

Philip's familiarisation with the different arguments and viewpoints of an increasingly divided household eventually begins to erode his loyal acquiescence to the authority of his father: "[s]ince what Uncle Monty said to him about Lindbergh was exactly what Rabbi Bengelsdorf had told him - and what Sandy was secretly saying to me - I began to wonder if my father knew what he was talking about" (125). By "trying not to stop believing in my father as well as in the Democrats and FDR" (126), Philip attempts to stem the emerging gulf of voices that oppose Herman. However, he is ultimately unable to find refuge from the trauma that events surrounding Lindbergh's Presidency inflict upon the secure childhood world that had been underwritten by his father's Rooseveltian convictions.

The Plot against America has been read by some commentators as expressive of a sentimental pining for the lost world of Jewish immigrant origins that Roth had so railed against in earlier works. For example, Timothy Parrish argues that, "since *American Pastoral*, Roth's sympathy lies with the father's point of view" (3). In terms of *The Plot against America*, he explains that: "[t]he narrator of this Philip Roth novel seems closer to the perspective of Zuckerman's Jewish foils in *Zuckerman Bound* than he does to the Zuckerman of those works" (2005b, 97). Similarly, David Herman suggests that:

> Roth's early books present the Jewish parents as sometimes hysterical, even comic, people with values to be reacted against, to be left behind. Here, they are right (77)

J.P. Steed also contributes to this debate, claiminging that "[w]hereas in nearly all – if not all – Roth's previous novels there has been a great deal of animosity expressed toward traditional Jewishness, often represented by (negatively) stereotypical Jewish parents, Roth seems to have revered the polarities in this new novel" (145). However, I would argue that such assessments fail to address how notions of origin, Jewish or otherwise, are subject to a paradoxical experience of trauma and fracture in Roth's work. There is, as in *American Pastoral*, a clear tone of nostalgia invoked by Philip's childhood memories in *The Plot against America*. Yet by contrast, the harrowing experience of loss that Philip is subject to in the novel is accompanied by his growing awareness of the limited purview of the Jewish family upbringing that had provided him with so much protection and security prior to Lindbergh's rise to power. Whereas once he had enjoyed a child's innocent sense of invulnerability under the joint auspices of FDR's "protective republic" and the home life regulated by "ferociously responsible parents" (301), the older Philip now looks back on such a glorious period with some degree of regret as being the result of nothing more than a "cunning deception."

As he becomes alarmed by the rising sense of insecurity within the world that had been so clearly defined for him by his parents, the young Philip expresses a growing desire to escape his family surroundings. This marks an urge to abandon the inherited trauma of his origins as the son of second generation, Jewish-American parents. Such a desire for liberation from his increasingly vulnerable and restrictive sense of Jewish home life is symbolised by Philip's attempted escape to the Catholic orphanage that occupies a space on the outskirts of his known world of Summit Avenue:

> I wanted nothing to do with history. I wanted to be a boy on the smallest scale possible. I wanted to be an orphan (232)

Similar to how it functions in *I Married a Communist*, the figure of the orphan in *The Plot against America* works as a metaphor for Philip's growing loss of faith in the authority of his father. Described as "a rescuer" for whom "orphans were his specialty," Herman Roth outlines to his son the perils involved in being without the protection of

parents: “[w]itness, he would tell you, what happened to Alvin … [m]otherless and fatherless you are vulnerable to manipulation, to influences - you are rootless and you are vulnerable to everything” (358). Yet despite his father’s warning, Philip is, in many ways, made “rootless” and “vulnerable to everything” alien and threatening by the irreversible catastrophe that events surrounding Lindbergh’s Presidency bring to his once idyllic sense of home. As I have suggested, this painful experience of lost innocence and traumatised origins exposes Philip to the wide range of conflicting voices that populate his narrative memoir of events. For Philip, many of these alien forms of expression and argument seriously threaten to impugn the abiding rule of Herman and his New Deal inspired values in the Roth family home. In his growing desire to hear and then mimic these new and exciting forms of speech, he is in ways betraying his father’s presumed position of authority over his son. Therefore, in as much as the declining authority of his parent’s highly protective values of liberal reasoning in the novel brings about considerable anguish and regret for him, it also ushers Philip into a greater sense of the possibilities for knowledge and expression that lie beyond the well-ordered universe of his home. In similar ways to how he explores the relationship between fathers and sons in the Zuckerman novels, there is a symbolic connection made by Roth in *The Plot against America* between the waning of paternal authority and the aspiring or burgeoning writer’s growing awareness of the creative possibilities of (self-) authorship.

Despite this sense of the literary author’s separation from his Jewish origins, however, Philip’s memoir still fixates upon the dreadful experiences of fear and anguish that brought about such a break from home in the first place. It is this paradoxical experience of the past as a trauma that he wishes to abandon, and yet obsessively returns to, that defines Philip’s relationship with the world of his parents in the novel. At one stage, the child’s narrative consciousness, reflecting upon the bounteous splendour that is Summit Avenue, remarks that “[n]othing would ever get me to leave here” (207). Such affectionate words of attachment to home stand in contrast to those of Evelyn, who, in trying to encourage Philip to embrace the proposed removal of the Roth family

into the non-Jewish American heartland by the Office of American Absorption, asks him: "[d]o you want to sit on the front stoop of Summit Avenue for the rest of your life, or do you want to go out into the world like Sandy did and prove that you are as good as anyone?" (217). Philip's eventual departure away from his parochial Jewish beginnings and into the wider world of writing is haunted by a sense of a lingering and unfinished trauma. By re-visiting in his narrative the painful site of origins from which he has sought liberation, Philip demonstrates the peculiarly fractured manner in which he (and Roth) has in fact remained rooted to the world of parents and Jewish community life into which he was born. This paradoxical experience of Jewish subjectivity as a trauma that engenders departure and return, refusal and recognition for Philip is characterised by his description of Alvin as someone whose many acts of rebellion against his elders resulted in a form of behaviour that had an uncanny resemblance to those whom he wished to defy:

> That's the tyranny of the problem. Trying to be faithful to what he's trying to be rid of. Trying to be faithful and trying to get rid of what he is faithful to at the same time (298)

This circuitous sense of conflict describes the central aesthetic dilemma in Roth's writing in relation to notions of the father, origin or 'real.' As I have been illustrating throughout this thesis, Roth's writing constantly seeks to transcend or "get rid of" what is considered 'real' or original by transforming it into fiction. At the same time, the many accusations of betrayal and falsification hurled at a character like Zuckerman for his attempts to reinvent life as fiction demand that he remains in some way tied or "faithful" to those very "facts" which he has sought to escape through his art. Philip's memoir in *The Plot against America*, therefore, further dramatises the sense of Jewish family origins as an "amiable irritant" within Roth's ongoing exploration of ideas of literature and self-authorship. Furthermore, as in the novels of the American trilogy, the traumatic notion of Jewish subjectivity explored in this novel also serves as a means of fracturing the liberal political concept of national belonging/origins that Philip had once believed to be fully consummate with his ethnic heritage.

"A book about knowing where to go for your agony and then going there for it"[39]

In *Exit Ghost*, Zuckerman temporarily emerges out of the self-imposed exile from day to day social existence that he had endured in the novels of the American trilogy. Visiting New York to undergo a medical procedure that he hopes will cure him of the incontinence suffered as a result of prostate cancer, Zuckerman finds himself "putting a foot back in" (14) to the greater public world that he had turned his back on in these previous works: "I had a moment not unlike Rip Van Winkle's when, after having slept for twenty years, he came out of the mountains and walked back to his village believing he'd merely been gone overnight" (14-15). Much like in *I Married a Communist*, *American Pastoral* and *The Human Stain*, Zuckerman explains in *Exit Ghost* how his steadfast commitment to an impersonal mode of literature, while living alone in the Berkshires, has allowed him to overcome the painful traumas that had previously marked both his private life and his writing. By "ceas[ing] to inhabit not just the great world but the present moment" (1), he claims to have found a means by which to liberate both his fiction and himself from the harried tribulations caused by his prior involvements with 'real' life: "by paring and paring and paring away, I found in my solitude a species of freedom that was to my liking much of the time" (58-59). However, Zuckerman's return to New York has the effect of casting him back into the turbulent fray of erotic desire and thanatological anguish that had so coloured his life and writing prior to the American trilogy. In as much as his exclusive commitment to the disinterested pursuit of literary goals while living in isolation has afforded him a degree of transcendence from the corporeal and contingent aspects of life outside of writing, Zuckerman is "reembodied" (279) by his decision to re-enter the maelstrom of contemporary American life in *Exit Ghost*. He describes how, by once again finding "desirable the manifold relations that make for a rich, full life" (58), he was abandoning the serenity of living in exile from the greater social world and re-entering "[i]nto the mutability *again*" (166). Although he has sought refuge from the afflictions of mutable existence through an exalted ideal of literature as an immutable order of life, Zuckerman

[39] From *Exit Ghost*, page 41.

and his art prove to be hopelessly tied to the less elevated and transient experiences of the self, the body and desire in this novel.

The figure of E.I. Lonoff assumes an important presence in *Exit Ghost* as the ascetic literary master who has cast a spectral shadow over Zuckerman's efforts in later life to withdraw from "the agitation of the autobiographical" and write in a purely disinterested fashion. Lonoff's literary influence is brought into particular focus by the figure of Richard Kliman in *Exit Ghost*. Having arranged with Jamie Logan and Billy Davidoff – two young literary aspirants and earnest liberal opponents of George W. Bush – to swap his mountain-top cabin in New England for their Upper East Side apartment in Manhattan, Zuckerman is introduced by them to Kliman. Like Jamie and Billy, he is another ambitious young writer, who is seeking to make his mark on the world of American literature by undertaking the difficult and unprecedented task of writing Lonoff's biography. Seeking both Zuckerman's insight and approval, Kliman tells him how he wishes to expose the unknown fact that "Lonoff kept a great secret from his early years" (47) in the proposed biography. According to Kliman, Lonoff's tautened and highly impersonal style of writing was shaped by a profound desire to escape a shameful and deeply buried secret from his personal life.

This repressed biographical knowledge relates, Kliman claims, to Lonoff's involvement in an incestuous affair with a half-sister, carried out when he was a very young man. "The hiding was the catalyst for his genius" (47), he explains to Zuckerman. As well as soliciting the support of Zuckerman, Kliman sets out to harass the aged and chronically infirm Amy Bellette – the young Jewish princess who acted as Lonoff's assistant in *The Ghost Writer* – in an attempt to wrest from her a copy of Lonoff's unfinished novel, written while the two were living as lovers in Florence. Having got his hands on the first half of the manuscript from Amy, Kliman sets out to prove that the uncharacteristically expansive and uncontrolled narrative shape of Lonoff's unfinished final work can be made attributable to his deeply buried knowledge of having committed incest. He postulates how the great tensions between Lonoff's "laconic brand" (22) of

short story writing and the hidden scandal that lay concealed beneath his life of ascetic self-discipline became exacerbated and exposed during his arduous struggle to write in a longer and suppler prose style. In arguing thus, Kliman describes Lonoff's failure to achieve artistic mastery over his late foray into the novel as evidence of "a great writer's reckoning with the crime that intimidated him every day of his life" (272).

Telling Amy that he is the "biographer's obstacle" (156), Zuckerman is determined to protect the aesthetic integrity of Lonoff's impersonal style of literature from the "dirt-seeking snooping" (102) of Kliman. In his outrage at Kliman's sensational claims, Zuckerman lumps him with the "moralist prigs" and "feminist scolds" that help to make up what he calls the many "lice of literature" (288). He comes to view his battle with him in eschatological terms as a struggle to uphold certain high-literary principles of disinterestedness and creative excellence over what he claims are cheap efforts to reduce fiction to some biographical or social context: "[m]astering him was my last obligation to literature" (252). In this manner, Zuckerman virulently espouses the formalist belief by which Lonoff argues elsewhere in *Exit Ghost* that "serious fiction eludes paraphrase" (183). This determination to protect the autonomous space of aesthetic creativity against biographical "fantasies of the author extrapolated from fiction" (254) finds important resonances, Zuckerman explains, with his own earlier struggles to defend himself against the "denunciation of my first published stories as sinister manifestations of 'Jewish self-hatred'" (170). Yet as I have established at several different stages in this thesis, Zuckerman's efforts to parry this "excoriating indictment" (171) have merely served to re-calibrate his attachments to the ethnic origins from which he has sought to liberate himself as the uncompromising author of serious fiction. His narrative efforts to escape from and reinvent the "facts" are, somewhat paradoxically, motivated by the various outside pressures and voices of "indictment" which seek to inhibit his sense of authorial autonomy. I have suggested before how this self-perpetuating and circuitous conflict between life and literature in Zuckerman's writing renders him both tied to and separated from the world of the 'real' or origin. As the

character of Shuki informs him in *The Counterlife*, his fiction is "disproportionately engaged by the spectacle of what morally repels you, of your antithesis" (157).

His battle with Kliman in *Exit Ghost* further highlights how this key, yet painfully self-dividing antagonism has remained unresolved within Zuckerman's writing. His efforts to defend Lonoff's principles of authorial "anonymity" (45) over Kliman's biographical claims draw him back into the confusing and troubling mire of tensions between 'real' life and literature that he has sought to escape by living and writing in oblivion to the world existing beyond the page. Zuckerman seeks to discredit Kliman's biographical reading of Lonoff by making fully clear "the impenetrable line dividing fiction from reality" (267). Yet in doing so, his authorial focus is drawn back over that sacral "line" and returned to the point of conflict between literature and extra-literary issues of biographical or 'real' life. In the very act of challenging the mooted biography of Lonoff, therefore, Zuckerman comes to resemble Kliman as one who is engrossed by matters that are extraneous to the inner workings of art. Kliman thus serves as both an antagonist and a double for Zuckerman, highlighting the schizoid quality of the latter's literary style: a mode of fiction that is both tied to and yet which seeks to transcend the mutable and prosaic facts of daily life.

On first meeting Zuckerman, Kliman explains to him that "I'm trying to do no more or less than you did" (44) by writing about Lonoff. Although fully cognisant that what he is attempting to write is "not fiction" (44), Kliman draws comparison between how both he and the more youthful Zuckerman of *The Ghost Writer* have each sought to use the personal life of Lonoff as a subject for their writing. In response to Zuckerman's accusation that the younger man indulges in "just about the lowest of literary rackets" by "snooping" (102) around in Lonoff's private history, Kliman insists that both of them share the same sense of literary interest in the highly personal details of other lives:

> And the savage snooping calling itself fiction? … I'm not doing anything other than what you do. What any thinking person does. Curiosity is nurtured by *life* (102)

Kliman suggests here that Zuckerman's fiction cannibalises 'real' situations and lives in a way that is comparable to his own biographical approach to reading Lonoff's work. Yet in contrast to Kliman's narrow outline of the authorial context for Lonoff's work, Zuckerman views literature as a fluid and ruminative mode of transforming actual facts into fiction. Following her defence of Kliman's ambition to write about Lonoff's private life, Zuckerman attempts to explain to Jamie the sharp and important distinctions between literature and literary biography: "[t]here's the not-so that reveals the so – that's fiction; and there's the not-so that just isn't so – that's Kliman" (120). This idea of "the not-so that reveals the so" is suggestive of the high-formalist concept of the unique mode of knowledge and experience that is peculiar to literature, and which undermines simplistic efforts to find a linear connection between the literary work and life existing outside the text. This New Critical style argument finds a clear delineation in a posthumous letter written by Lonoff against "cultural journalism" (182) that Amy shows to Zuckerman. Invoking the formalist dictum that the reader should "[l]ook inward at the story only" (184), Lonoff castigates popular journalistic modes of criticism for their application of "phony ethical issues" (182) to great works of the literary imagination. There is a clear similarity for Zuckerman between the "not-so that just isn't so" of Kliman's planned biography and Lonoff's idea of "the lazy journalist's fiction" (183) that enacts a "[s]ensationalist cultural vandalism" (184) upon the rarefied and uniquely aesthetic value of important works of literature. Zuckerman exclaims that "[a]ny biographical treatment [of Lonoff] would be largely imaginary – in other words, a travesty" (45). In doing so, he makes a fine, yet very significant distinction between his own high-literary concept of literature as a singular means of reinventing the 'facts' and what he sees as the more vulgar style of fiction by which Kliman claims to unearth the truth about Lonoff's biography.

Kliman's pivotal role in *Exit Ghost* can be understood in light of what Peter Brooks might call the "textual erotics" of Roth's fiction, where narrative desire is incessantly driven by its constant awareness of potential death or closure. Kliman's belief that he has uncovered an indubitable biographical truth grounding the literary

output of Lonoff represents a thanatological form of destructive "vandalism" to Zuckerman's concept of fiction as its own separate realm of existence. Yet as I have shown, Zuckerman's efforts to breathe fictional life into the world of stale and prescriptive facts is continuously stimulated by a potentially self-nullifying desire for collision with such crude forms of certainty as that put forth by Kliman about Lonoff. In the same way that he is both drawn to and repelled by notions of the 'real' external to his fiction, therefore, Zuckerman's desire for creative mastery over the raw details of life is, at one and the same time, both challenged with impotence and restored to vitality by the thanatological threat posed by Kliman. As a result of this dual role that Kliman performs as adversary and accomplice in Zuckerman's authorship of events in *Exit Ghost*, there are various contradictory moments of close comparison and sharp contrast made between them both in the novel. In such instances, Zuckerman, as the highly biographical literary author, is both set at odds with and yet also made comparable to Kliman, the author of literary biography. As I will suggest below, this ambiguous relationship between Zuckerman and Kliman in *Exit Ghost* is situated upon a rotating axis of desire and death that is central to Roth's notion of the connection between fact and fiction, the personal and aesthetic, body and text.

Zuckerman's resurgent desire to confront the overlapping mixture of personal and literary challenges posed by the world of extra-literary 'facts' on his visit to New York is signalled by a momentary re-awakening of his previously defunct libido in the novel. Although his impotence is not reversed in any way, what Zuckerman calls "the ghost of my desire" (66) is stirred by the figure of Jamie Logan in *Exit Ghost*. This faint sense of sexual revival in the company of Jamie is linked to Zuckerman's renewed longing to be among the chaotic and mutable world of 'real' life in New York: "[w]hatever the force prying me back open at seventy-one – whatever the force that had sent me down to New York … was quickly gathering its strength in the presence of Jamie Logan" (36-37). Wracked by impotent frustration, Zuckerman never gets to enjoy any physical sexual encounter with Jamie in the novel. The "ghost" of his libidinal yearning does, however, find expression through a detached and disembodied act of

writing in which Zuckerman dramatises an imagined intimacy between both of them. An evolving dialogue that he entitles *He and She*, this piece of writing indicates the significant relationship between the erotic drive and the art of fiction for Zuckerman. He explains how *He and She* involves an aesthetic mode of desire that is impossible to satisfy in 'real' or visceral terms, but which, as a paradoxical result of its very insatiability, is driven toward a relentless expansion and heightening of its creative act of longing:

> this scene of dialogue unspoken recorded what hadn't been done and was an aid to nothing, alleviated nothing, achieved nothing, and yet, just as on election night, it had seemed terribly necessary to write the instant I came through the door, the conversations she and I don't have more affecting even than the conversations we do have, and the imaginary "She" vividly at the middle of her character as the actual "she" will never be (147)

The endless potential for improvisation and creative re-working that "the imaginary 'She'" holds is intensified by the fact that the 'real' Jamie is ultimately unattainable to the impotent and eviscerated old man, Zuckerman. Aware of the agonising frustrations involved in such inexorable (literary) pursuit of an ever elusive object of desire, Zuckerman asks: "isn't one's pain quotient shocking enough without fictional amplification, without giving things an intensity that is ephemeral in life and sometimes even unseen?" (147). Yet despite his description of *He and She* as "*an improvisation best aborted and left to die*" (146), he goes on to appraise it as an example of the life-affirming urge to reinvent and illuminate upon lived existence that literature so richly nurtures, albeit never fully sates: "[f]or some very, very few that amplification, evolving uncertainly out of nothing, constitutes their only assurance, and the unlived, the surmise, fully drawn in print on paper, is the life whose meaning comes to matter most" (147).

Again, a parallel can be drawn here between Zuckerman's idea of fiction as a superlative mode of "unlived" existence and Lonoff's similar concept of literature as something that transcends quotidian social and domestic reality. Yet although Zuckerman's writing is situated at a fictional remove from lived experience, it takes root, paradoxically, from within a moment of unrelenting conflict with the world of

'real' things. Unlike the purely disinterested literary figure that Lonoff cuts, Zuckerman is both embodied by libidinal desire and yet also an impotent exile from the world of sexual striving. The mixture of erotic pleasure and thanatological pain that engenders Zuckerman's garrulous and proliferate exploration of the 'real' within fiction is something that runs contrary to Lonoff's tautened and disciplined style of short story writing. Zuckerman explains to Amy how "the novelist's passion for amplification was just another form of excess that ran counter" to Lonoff's "own special gift for condensation and reduction" (23). By contrast, he describes how the aesthetic crisis that plagued Lonoff's last five years resulted from the uncharacteristic "waywardness" of his decision to "escape th[e] imprisoning regimen" of the isolated writer and "to take as his mate a charming, intelligent, adoring young woman half his age" (21). As in Zuckerman's own fiction, sexual desire is related to the formal "waywardness" or "amplification" that debilitates Lonoff's late effort to write as a novelist. Amy recounts to Zuckerman how Lonoff's attempt to work in longer prose was marked by a sense of frustration with its incoherent form:

> He said, 'It's boring. It's endless. It has no shape. No design.' I said, 'None that you can impose. It will impose its own design.' 'When? When I'm dead?' (194)

This aggravating tussle between Lonoff's efforts to impose authorial control and the tendency for novelistic material to "impose its own design" mirrors the interplay of libidinal thrust and frustrated impotence that defined Zuckerman's plight throughout the *Zuckerman Bound* collection and *The Counterlife*. In the American trilogy, Zuckerman attempts to renounce desire and the distractions of life outside of literature, in an effort to live by similar means as Lonoff once did and, by doing so, emulate his form of controlled and disinterested literary style. Yet, as *I Married a Communist*, *American Pastoral* and *The Human Stain* all highlight, Zuckerman's desire to engage with the traumas of social existence in America is never fully vanquished by his self-imposed exile from the world, but merely displaced through the biographies of his protagonists in each work. His decision to re-engage with the larger world beyond writing – re-discovering what he calls "[t]he impulse to be in it and of it" (1) – in *Exit Ghost* sees

Zuckerman, once more, embody in person the fraught struggle between erotic desire and thanatological frustration that characterises his "fictional amplification" of lived existence.

While he is stirred by what he calls the most "worldly in-the-world place" (279) of New York in this novel, Zuckerman also expresses a wish to resume the isolated life of ascetic self-denial through which he had: "set out to minimize the loss [suffered from impotence] by struggling to pretend that desire had naturally abated" (67). It is this sense of wanting to be both embodied and disembodied – present in the world and absent from it – that continues to leave Zuckerman's writing and personal life crippled by divisions throughout *Exit Ghost*. Nowhere are the personal and aesthetic vagaries caused by his revived determination to be in erotic/literary "collision" (280) with 'real' life more evident than in his conflict with Kliman:

> I had to find out whether what they were saying about Lonoff was true. Don't ask me why I had to. I didn't know. And the nonsensical character of my quest didn't stop me … Once around with the passions wasn't enough? Once around with the unknowable wasn't enough? Into the mutability *again?* (165-6)

In contrast to this sense of "mutability" and uncertainty associated with Zuckerman's fictional efforts to understand "unknowable" life, Lonoff's ideal of literature as an immutable order of existence is one that seeks to transcend the corporeal and transient matters of death and desire. While Zuckerman's fictional efforts to imaginatively transform the facts surrounding both his and other lives are linked to traditionally embodied ideas of the 'real,' the biographical self and desire, Lonoff's more immutable aesthetic concept is tied to notions of a "posthumous existence" (221) in *Exit Ghost*. In a passage from *He and She*, the character of Zuckerman quotes for Jamie a line from Keats's last letter: "'I have an habitual feeling of my real life having past,' he said, 'and that I am leading a posthumous existence'" (221). Keats' idea of literature and the literary artist as existing beyond the corpus of "real life" not only encapsulates Lonoff's disinterested mode of writing, but also helps to explain the reasons behind Zuckerman's determination to protect the latter's "posthumous" reputation as a writer from damning

discoveries about his lived biography. By contrast, Zuckerman's writing involves a mutually overlapping relationship between the 'real' and a fictional notion of the extra-real; between the biographical and impersonal aestheticism. In this sense, his fiction is divided between notions of mutability and immutability, corporeality and posthumous life. Despite his efforts to "pull the plug on the[se] contradictions" (69) by living and writing in monastic seclusion, a la Lonoff, *Exit Ghost* demonstrates the self-lacerating effect that Zuckerman's desire to inhabit and aesthetically engage with the 'real' world existing beyond the pages of literature continues to have on him as both a writer and a man.

The mixture of erotic longing and thanatological dread that shapes Zuckerman's visit to New York is largely bred by his confrontation with Kliman over Lonoff's aesthetic legacy. He explains how this conflict with Kliman has had a comparable effect to that of Jamie in helping to restore his dormant ambition to engage on both a professional and personal level with the transient scene of contemporary American life:

> Back in the drama, back in the moment, back into the turmoil of events! … There is the pain of being in the world, but there is also the robustness. When was the last time I had felt the excitement of taking someone on? Let the intensity out! Let the belligerent out! ... both Kliman and Jamie having the effect of rousing the virility in me again (103)

There is further evidence here of how Zuckerman finds in the external world of biographical and 'real' life facts both a dangerous impediment to and a fertile basis for his particular literary mode of reinventing reality. Kliman's claims about the relationship between literature and its authorial context provide a valuable expression of the "intractable" and antagonistic world of the 'real' against which Zuckerman's erotic narrative "intensity" is typically aroused: "[a] resuscitating breath of the old contention luring me into the old role" (103). At the same time, the revived sense of "virility" that his clash with Kliman invokes is foreshadowed by a thanatological experience of "pain" and mortality. Ironically, it is by defending the autonomous space of Lonoff's fiction against the invasive encroachments of Kliman's biography that Zuckerman is lured away from his own isolated life of creative detachment and back toward the chaotic maelstrom

of libidinal desire and painful uncertainty which had characterised his life and writing in earlier novels.

By way of emphasising the similarities that cut across the antagonism between both men, the "robustness" and erotic energy that define Zuckerman's efforts to bring a sense of "fictional amplification" to events in *Exit Ghost* are made comparable, at certain stages of the novel, to Kliman's (distinctly opposing) attempts to reduce the meaning of Lonoff's spiralling and incomplete last work to some core biographical origin. Zuckerman explains to Jamie his dislike of Kliman as one who lacks the "sobriety" for handling "serious" literary matters and whose obstinate determination to write a sensationalised account of Lonoff's life reflects an unconsidered and emotional penchant for "audacity, defiance, and highjinks" (116). Yet when Jamie defends Kliman's ambitions to write the controversial biography by suggesting that "[h]e's drawn to daring ventures," Zuckerman reminisces to himself: "[d]aring ventures … I had gorged on them" (120). Elsewhere, he makes comparisons between himself and Kliman as examples of "[t]he Jew at his most buoyant, capable of a calm relationship with nothing and no one" (253). Drawing a portrait of this frenzied and confrontational Jewish figure from such archetypes as Lenny Bruce and Abbie Hoffman, Zuckerman elaborates that:

> for all I knew, Kliman *was* the last of the agitators and affronters. I had been out of contact with anyone like him for a long time. I had been out of contact with a lot of things for a long time, and not just with the resistance of vital beings but with having either to enact the role of myself or to parry fantasies of the author extrapolated from fiction by the most naïve readers – a stale labor from whose tedium I had also disengaged. For I had been something of an affronter once too (253-4)

Kliman embodies the memories of the self, before prostate cancer and his withdrawal from the greater social world, as a "vital being" that buoy Zuckerman's partially renewed sense of sexual and aesthetic desire in *Exit Ghost*. Yet, in circular fashion, he also represents a virile young competitor who threatens to pulverise Zuckerman's idea of fiction as an unending and incommensurable desire for re-imagining the 'real': "I foresaw only defeat should I persist in colliding with this impostor's aims and the

vitality and ambition and tenacity and anger that fuelled them" (274). Despite his avowed literary stance, Zuckerman's obsession with matters of the 'real,' the self and desire renders him ultimately incapable of being more like Lonoff, the self-effacing and asexual aesthete, and less like Kliman, the "snooping" and erotically charged biographer. In self-tortured fashion, Zuckerman is both Lonoff and Kliman – protagonist and antagonistic – in *Exit Ghost.* He is both disinterestedly removed from life outside of literature and, at the same time, erotically transfixed by his efforts to transform what is 'real' into fiction.

Zuckerman determines to discredit Kliman by finding a source within literary history which will explain the uniquely creative and "unautobiographical" (200) impetus behind Lonoff's unfinished novel. Telling Amy that "I cannot write Manny's biography, but I can write the biography of that book" (199-200), Zuckerman proceeds to argue that Lonoff employed the "unprovable conjectures" drawn by "renegade scholars" (200) about an incestuous relationship between Nathaniel Hawthorne and his sister, Elizabeth, as the inspiration for his unfinished novel. Zuckerman explains to Amy how Lonoff "laid claim to these conjectures about Hawthorne and his beautiful, enchanting older sister" as a "story" that "opened his predicament out for him and enabled him to leave the personal behind" (200). Yet by arguing thus, Zuckerman reveals a complex narrative framing in which he tries to connect himself to Lonoff as a "wholly unautobiographical writer" (200) who exploits, for fictional purposes, the uncertain facts surrounding the 'real' lives of others:

> 'Fiction for him [Lonoff] was never representation. It was rumination in narrative form. He thought, I'll make this my reality.' While, in fact, I was thinking in much the same vein: I'll make this reality mine. Amy's, Kliman's, everyone's. And for the next hour I proceeded to, effulgently arguing its logic until I had come to believe it myself (200-01)

Just as he would have Amy believe that Lonoff used the scandal surrounding Hawthorne's private life as his "objective correlative," Zuckerman himself subjects the drama surrounding Kliman's biographical study to "the fluctuations of the novelist's mind," by which he "puts everything in motion … [and] makes everything shift and

slide" (200). In many ways, therefore, his imaginative account of what motivated Lonoff's final work marks Zuckerman's attempt to claim a shared lineage between them both as writers for whom fiction does not originate in any positivist notion of experience lying outside of the text, but which instead involves a purely literary "rumination" upon what is 'real.' However, Zuckerman's unique counter-fiction to Kliman's biography involves yet another means of appropriating and re-inventing the lived and distinctly private experiences of others. Contrary to Kliman, Zuckerman insists that by "mak[ing] this reality mine" the lives of people such as Amy, Lonoff and Hawthorne are only ever known to him as imagined literary subjects, rather than in terms of biographical truths or facts. At the same time, there is also a sort of admission to guilt in the above cited passage by which Zuckerman reveals how he is, in ways that might also resemble Kliman, borrowing for his own authorial benefit from the personal ordeals of others. Somewhat ironically, in his efforts to protect Lonoff's privacy against Kliman's parasitical "snooping," Zuckerman also (albeit in terms of literary speculation rather than a biographical assumption of fact) intrudes upon the very notion of authorial anonymity that he sets out to defend in the first place. In this fashion, his constant mining of the uncertainties and fictional possibilities of 'real' life is shadowed by a certain blurring of the distinctions between fiction and biography in Zuckerman's writing.

Zuckerman's fractured sense of wanting to be both engaged by and disengaged from a greater sense of social involvement in *Exit Ghost* is contextualised by various moments of trauma that have wreaked havoc upon the wider national experience since mid-century. Like Rip Van Winkle, he has returned from his mountain-top slumber to find a scene of active political enthusiasm among the American polity. Arriving back to New York on the eve of the Bush/Kerry Presidential election of 2004, Zuckerman is invited by Jamie and Billy to watch the results of the vote with them at their apartment. The young couple's fervent disdain for the Bush Administration and how "[a]ll their intolerance focuses on a liberal society" (81-82) is contrasted with Zuckerman's apparent indifference to current political events. Much to the incredulity of his earnest

young companions, he claims to have no knowledge whatsoever of the recent Presidential race. Explaining how he has "served … [his] tour as exasperated liberal and indignant citizen" (36), Zuckerman declares a complete sense of personal detachment from the ongoing travails of American politics: "I don't want to register an opinion, I don't want to express myself on the 'issues'" (37). "[A] one time creature of intensive responsiveness who'd over the preceding decade tautened himself into a low-keyed solitary" (43), Zuckerman explains how his gradual recoil from all matters relating to American public life has allowed him to overcome "the cluster of extreme historical shocks" (97) that have fractured his once spirited sense of liberal idealism. In an attempt to justify his radical disengagement from broader issues of national politics and culture, he elaborates upon the mixture of confusion, despair and anger which events such as the Vietnam War and Watergate had aroused in him:

> I was familiar with the theatrical emotions that the horrors of politics inspire. From the 1965 transformation into a Vietnam hawk of the peace candidate Lyndon Johnson until the 1974 resignation of all-but-impeached Richard Nixon, they were a staple in the repertoire of virtually everyone I knew. You're heartbroken and upset and a little hysterical, or you're gleeful and vindicated for the first time in ten years, and your only balm is to make theater of it (94-95)

What is clear in this passage is how Zuckerman links the "horrors" of historical events to the ludicrous "theater" of the post-war scene, in which any 'real' or knowable sense of a shared public life that was once set forth by the progressive-liberal vision of America has now been completely shattered. This unnerving sense of public life as "theater" is evoked elsewhere by the experience of the "indigenous American berserk" that Zuckerman re-visits in *American Pastoral*, or the comparably "haywire country" that he struggles to fathom in *Zuckerman Unbound*. The succession of defeats and failures that have destroyed the once robust liberal dream of America provide a pointed historical focus for the painful mixture of erotic longing and thanatological loss that accompanies being in the world of 'real' social attachments for Zuckerman. As a result, on his arrival back to New York he makes a determined effort "not … to collide with all this indignant, highly emotional crisis-brooding" (43) that is being evoked by the Bush/Kerry election.

The traumatic sense of political disillusionment that Zuckerman determines to evade finds an embodiment in the figure of Jamie, who sees the potential of a Bush victory as a final death-knell for American liberalism: "it'll be the end of the road for a whole way of political life" (81). In contrast to her expressions of shock and outrage at Bush's eventual re-election, Zuckerman maintains a certain disaffected poise: "I was merely onlooker and outsider now … the public drama did not intrude on me" (95). Refusing to share her distraught sense of concern over the terminal decline of progressive political values in an America under Republican rule, Zuckerman tries to reassure Jamie by explaining that:

> It's a flexible instrument we've inherited … It's amazing how much punishment we can take (82)

No longer pained or angered by the same sense of betrayal that earlier historical events had on his political ideals, Zuckerman contemplates telling Jamie that "[i]f in America you think like you do, nine times out of ten you fail" (86). In thus considering to himself how he might assuage Jamie's increasing sense of doom over Bush's defeat of Kerry, Zuckerman reveals further how the repeating pattern of historical traumas that he has already lived through have left him seemingly deadened to political dismay or outrage:

> I thought to say, It's bad, but not like waking up the morning after Pearl Harbor was bombed. It's bad, but not like waking up the morning after Kennedy was shot. It's bad, but not like waking up the morning after Martin Luther King was shot … I thought to say, We have all been through it (86)

This self-protective and benumbing attitude of resignation to the ritual shocks of history is juxtaposed to the more raw sense of injury that afflicts the much younger Jamie and Billy. Their difficult arrival at the "hard realization that they could not will this country back into being the Rooseveltian stronghold it had been some forty years before they were born" (86-87) marks for the aged and world weary Zuckerman merely one more variation on an increasingly redundant theme of liberal disbelief with the shortcomings of American political and cultural life. As he points out, Jamie and Billy

represent a liberal outlook that is becoming increasingly isolated from the American masses. While it might see itself in superior moral and intellectual terms to Bush's Republican Party, such a liberal position functions as a hollow shell of the populist Rooseveltian movement that it wishes to invoke:

> For all their sharpness and articulateness and savoir-faire … they'd had no idea who the great mass of Americans were, nor had they seen so clearly before that it was not those educated like themselves who would determine the country's fate but the scores of millions unlike them and unknown to them who had given Bush a second chance, in Billy's words, "to wreck a very great thing" (87)

This damning image of contemporary liberalism as ineffectual and detached from the wider American public calls to mind certain Republican accusations against liberals for being elitist and patronising in their over-protective efforts to regulate the lives of the masses. Jamie and Billy's political beliefs thus represent for Zuckerman the flayed and eviscerated remnants of an older New Deal model for social and cultural progress that had once been so vigorously attuned to the aspirations and needs of common Americans.[40]

Yet despite this suggestion that the younger couple's chagrin with current national events represents a rather toothless brand of liberalism for Zuckerman, there is also a suggestion in the novel that he continues to share in their particular politics of grief. As I have discussed, Zuckerman appears to view Jamie's horrified reaction to the Presidential election results as a redundant and ineffectual cry of liberal outrage. However, there is also a suggestion in the novel that her reaction to Bush's re-election does not necessarily mark a stale re-hashing of previous ailments, but may instead form part of a still raw and unfinished cycle of traumatic repetition within the American liberal experience. When thinking about highlighting to her how the particular form of political disillusionment she is experiencing is not unique but has a long and tiresome lineage, Zuckerman suddenly realises that: "[a]ll the things I thought to tell her would

[40] For example, George Packer bemoans this manner in which American liberalism has lost its previous sense of purpose within national life. Instead, he explains, liberalism has "becom[e] known as the creed of the weak, the soft, the guilt-ridden, the hyperintellectual, the privileged, the out-of-touch, the hypocritical – all those who don't want to see the world as it really is" (300).

likely strike her as cant … [s]he wanted to wake up the morning after George Bush had been shot" (86). The fervid emotional outpouring with which Jamie bemoans that "this country is a haven of ignorance" (84) in some ways brings to the surface the painful sense of an earlier trauma against which the aged Zuckerman is now determined to remain immunised. As much as he attempts to ease the traumatic impact of Bush's victory on her by explaining that "[w]e have all been through it," she, in turn, acts as a fresh reminder of his buried sense of liberal despair.

Using the images of a car crash and a burning building as metaphors, Zuckerman clearly signals this sense of a shared knowledge of trauma through which both he and Jamie are connected: "[s]he was looking at me … the way somebody being helped from a burning building or freed from a car crash looks at you, as though as an observer you might have something to say that could account for the catastrophe that's altered everything" (86). Although claiming that he is "merely an onlooker," Zuckerman is in fact re-connected with the "public drama" to which he believes himself to be now invulnerable by his role as witness to the trauma of Jamie's suffering. Through this participative act of witnessing, as I have outlined in my introduction, the spectator to traumatic events shares somewhat in the victim's traumatised reaction to what has happened. Therefore, as a seemingly impassive bystander to Jamie's anguish and bewilderment, Zuckerman is, paradoxically, re-connected to his own submerged feelings of "rage about how much worse it all was than you thought and the sorrow over how far your country had sunk" (87). In this way, his despair over certain events in American history remains part of a trauma that he both tries to discard and yet which continues to demand his attention. It is this ambiguous sense of being both within and outside of the greater life of American 'reality' that defines Zuckerman's tortured self-divisions not just in *Exit Ghost*, but throughout the series of earlier novels up to and including the American trilogy.

As the novel draws to a close, Zuckerman indicates how the dangers posed to Lonoff's legacy by Kliman's biographical claims may potentially foreshadow similar problems of misreading or misappropriation in relation to his own work:

> Once I was dead, who could protect the story of my life from Richard Kliman? Wasn't Lonoff his literary steppingstone to me? And what would my "incest" be? How will I have failed to be the model human being? (275)

It is clear both here and throughout the novel that Zuckerman is trying to protect the aesthetic autonomy of literary fiction from ideas or influences that are extraneous to its internal structures of creativity. However, as I have shown, suggestions made by Kliman that a personal trauma lies concealed at the heart of Lonoff's literature also become a kind of "steppingstone" through which Zuckerman himself re-explores the excruciating and inescapable conflicts in his own writing between the fictional and the 'real'; the impersonal and the biographical; the desiring, decaying body and the "posthumous," immutable value ascribed to notions of high literature. Just as he finds a means of disinterring older, buried experiences of personal grief through acting as a witness to Jamie's dismay over the state of American political values, Zuckerman's determination to contest Kliman's idea of a hidden trauma beneath Lonoff's life of aesthetic detachment serves, ironically, as a useful way to explore the confusion and pain that has attended his own life as a writer. Whereas he expresses a fear that Kliman will turn his attention next to "[*m*]*y* great, unseemly secret" (275), Zuckerman is in fact constantly flaunting the autobiographical conflicts that underwrite his work. However, unlike Kliman's notion of a secret that might fully explain the relationship between Lonoff's (or Zuckerman's) life and work outright, this idea of an unfinished and, ultimately, incomprehensible trauma in Zuckerman's life and writing refers to an experience that cannot be clearly known or made 'real,' but which is repeatedly re-visited by an expansive and proliferate process of "fictional amplification."

Throughout this discussion, I have clearly indicated how the circular repetition of trauma in Zuckerman's torn affiliations to both an exalted ideal of literature and the far

more prosaic facts of 'real' life have made him comparable, at different stages, to the irreconcilably polarised figures of Lonoff and Kliman. At one stage, he describes how Kliman closely reflects aspects of himself as the young writer who so boldly defended his role as literary author against the "excoriating indictment" of his father and other Jewish elders. Comparing himself to Kliman as one who has sought "the approval of the adults you clandestinely set about to defile" (99), Zuckerman reveals a glimpse of the complex and self-punishing introversion that lies at the heart of the many conflicts in his own writing. The ambiguous desire to both "defile" and seek "approval" that Zuckerman locates in Kliman's brash determination to tarnish the hallowed aura surrounding Lonoff's myth of literary genius is resonant of his own complex ties to the latter. In the arduous process of defending Lonoff's austere literary principles against the malignant "muck raking" of Kliman, as I have pointed out, Zuckerman himself betrays those very standards of disinterestedness and aesthetic autonomy that he sets out to uphold. Ironically, this combination of affiliation and disavowal is repeated, as I have shown in earlier chapters, by Zuckerman's peculiar sense of continued attachment to the world of his father and Jewish origins that he so flagrantly rejected in favour of the authority of Lonoff and his ideas about literature. In this profoundly dizzying way, Zuckerman is both "affronter" and defender, son and father, Kliman and Lonoff.

By the end of *Exit Ghost*, Zuckerman is finally balked in his efforts to tackle the thanatological threat to literary creativity that he finds in Kliman. He compares the youth and vigour of Kliman as "an unpredictable force bent on dominating me" (253) to his own unfavourable condition as "an exhausted escapee … from the coarse-grained world, eviscerated by impotence and in the worst state of his life" (269). There are comparisons here between the sense of a personal and aesthetic threat that Zuckerman senses from Kliman, as a "hulking, muscular figure" who was "forty three years younger than me" (103), and the portent of violence that emanates from Les at the end of *The Human Stain*. Zuckerman's self-abandoning declaration that "I was on a tear, and nothing could have inspired me more than the risk I was taking" (103) by challenging Kliman's biographical study of Lonoff recalls the mixture of intrigue and fear evoked in him by

the sight of Les out fishing on the frozen lake. In Kliman and Les, the author is confronted by figures who present both a potentially rich source of authorial possibility and the violent vanishing point of his attempts to write about 'real' life. By the novel's end, Zuckerman flees New York and abandons his desire "to resume residence there reembodied, to take on all the things I'd decided to relinquish – love, desire, quarrels, professional conflict" (279). The unceasing cycle of death and desire that attends his efforts to inhabit and write about mutable existence proves an overwhelming ordeal for the aged and decaying Zuckerman, who seeks personal and artistic refuge once more by returning to his life of ascetic solitude in the Berkshires: "I was back where I needed never be in collision with anyone or be coveting anything or go about being someone, convincing people of this or that and seeking a role in the drama of my times" (280). Yet even "with all of them in New York having vanished from sight," Zuckerman is still drawn to the fractious, erotic relationship between writing and lived experience – between being embodied within the world and writing as a detached or disembodied artist – that has characterised the fictional dialogue of *He and She*:

> I sat down at the desk by the window, looking out through the gray light of a November morning, across a snow-dusted road onto the silent, wind-flurried waters of the swamp … and, from that safe haven … wrote the final scene of *He and She* (280)

Although back living as an exile from the turbulent fray of events in New York, Zuckerman is still unable to relinquish his obsession with the pulsating life of 'real' people and events. Even as it is retreating into an ever-diminishing horizon, his (missed) encounter with Jamie is revived and intensified by the erotic process that is involved in writing *He and She*.

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